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THE VISITOR AT THE ZOO
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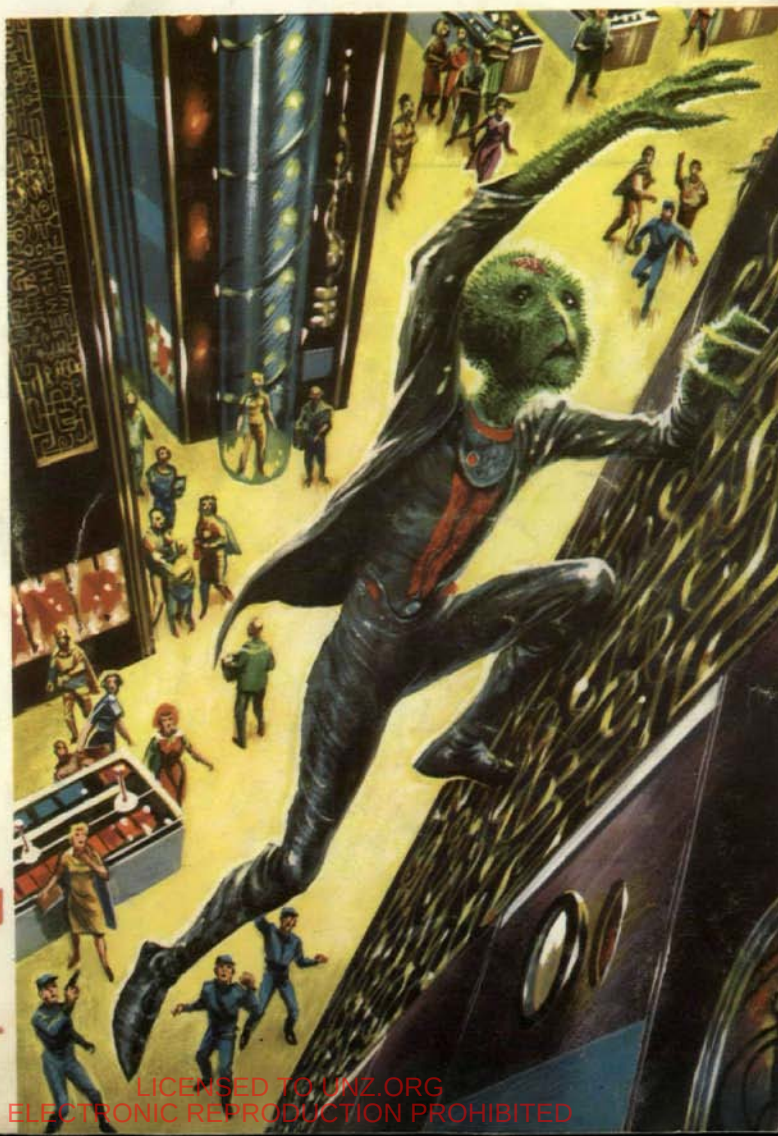
THE LONELY MAN
by THEODORE L. THOMAS



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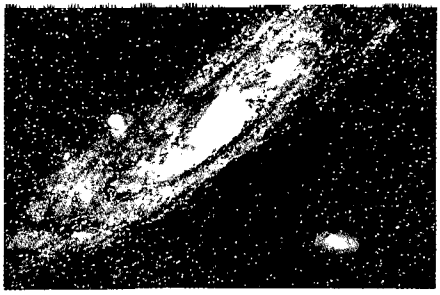

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

ONE OF the good things about being a science-fiction editor is that you get to meet an outsize share of the most argumentative, most individualistic and most personally rewarding humans alive: i.e., the science-fiction writers. There aren't very many of them. Perhaps there are two or three hundred in the world, at least on this side of the Iron Curtain. (We are told that there are at least ninety full-time sf writers in the U.S.S.R.; but none of them has as yet elected to offer his work to *Galaxy.*)

What these men and women lack in numbers they make up in articulation. We recently had the pleasure of participating in a panel discussion sponsored by *Playboy,* in which we endeavored

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to make ourselves heard in a congregation comprising Theodore Sturgeon, Poul Anderson, Robert A. Heinlein, William Tenn, Algis Budrys and Arthur C. Clarke. *Playboy* had the idea its readers would relish listening in on a tape-recorded bull session of these mighty minds, talking the shop-talk of their trade: What's next for the world? In its innocence *Playboy* provided a satchel full of tape on which to engrave the conversation that ensued; but when the talk stopped after four hours it was not because the science-fictionists had run out of conversation. *Playboy* had run out of tape.

Science-fiction writers come in all shapes and sizes. Rich man, poor man, beggar man, th—no, pass that one; doctor, lawyer . . . again no. We cannot think of either felon or Indian chief who writes science fiction, but almost every other occupation has its representatives in the ranks, from sober university professor (ret.) to short-order cook in a hamburger joint (also ret.) A doctor and a lawyer, come to think of it, are represented in the current issue.

The good doctor is J. F. Bone. If he chances to be a D.V.M. instead of an M.D., why, so much the better for the Pacific Northwest's livestock, and so much the worse for its human sufferers. One of our best-preserved memories of a Seattle visit a couple of years ago is of Jesse Bone explaining some medical complexities to a roomful of people, about half of whom were practicing M.D.s It may well be that a practice comprising everything from toads to Angus bulls may lead to contemplative ways of thought on the part of the practicioner; and thus from a consideration of the manifold blueprints by which our Earthly vertebrates are constructed to a guess at how Martian livestock may be put together . . . as in *On the Fourth Planet*.

The lawyer, then? Why, that is Theodore L. Thomas. Here's a fellow with a flourishing patent practice in a big Eastern state. That's his profession. For a hobby, he works at skin-diving; was one of the pioneers in the sport and has crept along the bottom of every body of water within range of his station wagon. In what category he places his science-fiction writing we cannot guess. The fact is that he writes a good deal of it, though, and he writes it very well. There was his *The Watery Wonders of Captain Nemo* (which we were lucky enough to publish in *Galaxy*) for one example; for another, there was his *The Weather Man* (which we weren't.)

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Frankly, this sort of behavior surprises us. We have long cherished a theory that lawyers are tone-deaf to style. It's against all their training, you see. A writer's job is to evoke images and suggest moods; a lawyer's is to nail down slippery facts, not merely so firmly that no one can misunderstand, but in such pettifogging detail that not even a contumacious imbecile can *pretend* he misunderstands. All those painfully detailed stipulations, that lumbering contractese that mumbles its way through thickets of and/ors and bogs of hereinafters: these are the death of art. A lawyer is permitted to imply nothing and to evoke nothing. He has to put the whole business in dull black and arid white.

Yet strangely we find that here a lawyer can throw off his occupational disease; for no one with a tin ear could have written *The Lonely Man.* Then there is Damon Knight, for whom a dozen pages like this one could hardly do justice.

Damon Knight is that rather rare specimen, the science-fiction writer who makes that his principal occupation. Of course, it is not always stories that he writes. His critical anthology, *A Century of Science Fiction,* is the closest thing to a handbook of the field that anyone has yet produced; and as a book reviewer, Knight has at least two distinctions—the only critic to be given an award for his work, and the only critic to have had his opinions gathered into book form. Both distinctions are well earned.

Yet if we had to choose between Knight the editor-critic and Knight the writer we would have no hesitation. Good as his first avatar is, it is as a writer that he triumphs. Everybody knows Damon Knight's biting short stories — *Not with a Bang, To Serve Man* — and his brilliant novelettes, *What Rough Beast and Cabin Boy* . . . to name only a pair of each out of dozens. Damon Knight's great lack as a fiction writer has been in the novel; there haven't been enough of them. But he is beginning to repair that deficiency. In the present issue we have the longest story he has ever had in *Galaxy* . . . and, we think, his best. It is called *The Visitor at the Zoo.*

And we haven't even mentioned that stocky and formidably talented Californian, Kris Neville, nor Magnus Ludens, who turns up at odd times, from odd parts of the world, with odd stories. An interesting and rewarding lot, science-fiction writers. We're glad to know them. And we're glad to be able to go on presenting the best part of them — their stories — to you. —**THE EDITOR**

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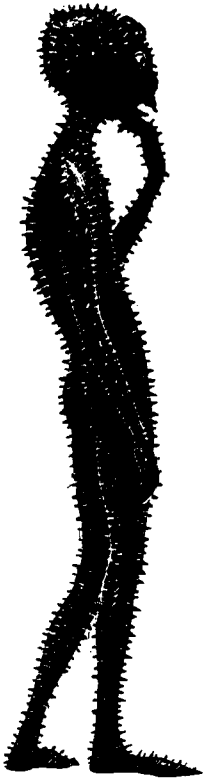
THE VISITOR AT THE ZOO



by Damon Knight

AS THE Flugbahn car began to slide away from the landing platform, the biped Fritz clutched the arms of his seat and looked nervously down through the transparent wall.

He was unused to travel. Except for the trip by spaceship to Earth, which he hardly remembered, he had lived all his life in the Hamburg Zoo. Now — although he was sure the suspended car would not fall — being so high, and surrounded by nothing but glass, made him want to grip something for security.

In the seat beside him, his keeper, a stupid man named Alleks, was unfolding the crisp parchment sheets of the Berliner

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The biped's home was eighteen light years away — in space — but remoter still in the distances of the mind!

Illustrated by EMSH

Zeitung. The breath whistled in his hairy nostrils as he gazed cow-eyed at the headlines. Down the aisle, the other passengers were all staring at Fritz, but being used to this, the biped hardly noticed it.

Below, Berlin was spread out in the morning sun like a richly faded quilt. Looking back, as the car began to fall with increasing speed, Fritz could see the high platform where the Hamburg rocket-copter had landed, and the long spidery cables of the other Flugbahnen radiating outward to the four quarters of the city.

The car swooped, rose, checked at a station platform. The doors opened and closed again, then

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they were falling once more. At the second stop, Alleks folded his paper and got up. "Come," he said.

Fritz followed him onto the platform, then into an elevator that dropped, in a dizzying fashion, through a transparent spiral tube, down, down and down, while the sunlit streets flowed massively upward. They got off into a bewildering crowd and a sharp chemical odor. Alleks, with a firm grip on the biped's arm, propelled him down the street, through a tall open doorway, then into another elevator and finally into an office full of people.

"My dear young sir," said a red-faced fat man, advancing jovially, "come in, come in. Allow me to introduce myself, I am Herr Doktor Grück. And you are our new biped? Welcome, welcome!" He took the biped's three-fingered hand and shook it warmly, showing no distaste at the fact that it was covered with soft, feathery-feeling spines.

Other people were crowding around, some aiming cameras. "Sign," said Alleks, holding out a dog-eared notebook.

Dr. Grück took the notebook absently, scribbled, handed it back. Alleks turned indifferently and was gone. "Gentlemen and ladies," said Grück in a rich tenor, "I have the honor to introduce to you our newest acquisition, Fritz — our *second* Brecht Biped — and you see that he is a male!"

The biped darted nervous glances around the oak-paneled room, at the whirring cameras, the bookshelves, the massive chandelier, the people with their naked pink faces. His body was slight and supple, like that of a cat or a rooster. The grayish-green, cactus-like spines covered him all over, except for the pinkish sacs that swung between his thighs. His odd-shaped head was neither human, feline nor avian, but something like all three. Above the eyes, in the middle of his wide sloping forehead, was a round wrinkled organ of a dusty red-purple color, vaguely suggestive of a cock's comb, in shape more like a withered fruit.

"A word for the newscast!" called some of the people with cameras.

OBEDIENTLY, as he had been taught, the biped recited, "How do you do, gentlemen and ladies? Fritz, the biped, at your service. I am happy to be here and I hope you will come to see me often at the Berlin Zoo." He finished with a little bow.

Three white-smocked men stepped forward; the first bowed, took the biped's hand. "Wenzl, Head Keeper." He was bony and

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pale, with a thin straight mouth. The next man advanced, bowed, shook hands. "Rausch, Dietitian." He was blonder and ruddier than Grück, with eyelashes almost white in a round, serious face. The third: "Prinzmetal, our veterinary surgeon." He was dark and had sunken cheeks.

Dr. Grück beamed, his red face as stretched and shiny as if cooked in oil. His round skull was almost bald, but the blond hair, cut rather long, still curled crisply above his ears. His little blue eyes gleamed behind the rimless glasses. His body, round and firm as a rubber ball under the wide brown waistcoat and the gold watch-chain, radiated joy. "What a specimen!" he said, taking the biped's jaw in one hand to open the mouth. "See the dentition!" The biped's "teeth" were two solid pieces of cartilaginous tissue, with chisel-shaped cutting edges. He broke free nervously after a moment, clacking his wide jaws and shaking his head.

"Halt, Fritz!" said Grück, seizing him to turn him around. "See the musculature — perfect! The integument! The color! Never, I promise you, even on Brecht's Planet, would you find such a biped. And he is already sexually mature," said Grück, probing with his fat hand between Fritz's legs. "Perfect! You would like to meet a female biped, would you not, Fritz?"

The biped blinked and said haltingly, "My mother was a female biped, honored sir."

"Ha ha!" said Grück, full of good humor. "So she was! Correct, Fritz!" Rausch smiled; Prinzmetal smiled; even Wenzl almost smiled. "Come then, first we will show you your quarters, and afterward — perhaps a surprise!"

Picking up his shiny new valise, the biped followed Grück and the others out of the office, along a high, glass-walled corridor that overlooked the grounds with their scattered cages. People walking on the gravel paths looked up and began to point excitedly. Grück, in the lead, bowed and waved benignly down to them.

Inside, they emerged in an empty hall. Wenzl produced a magnetic key to open a heavy door with a small pane of wired glass set into it. Inside, they found themselves in a small but conveniently arranged room, with walls and floor of distempered concrete, a couch which could be used for sitting or sleeping, a chair and table, some utensils, a washbowl and toilet. "Here is the bedroom," said Dr. Grück with a sweeping gesture. "And here —" he led the way through a doorless opening — "your per-

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sonal living room." The outer wall was of glass, through which, behind an iron railing, they saw a crowd of people. The room was larger and more nicely furnished than the one inside. The floor was tiled and polished. The walls were painted. There was a comfortable relaxing chair, a television, a little table with some magazines and newspapers on it, a large potted plant, even a shelf full of books.

"And now for the surprise!" cried Dr. Grück. Brushing the others aside, he led the way again through the bedroom, to another doorless opening in the far wall. The room beyond was much larger, with a concrete floor on which, however, some rubber mats had been laid, and two desks with business machines, filing cabinets, wire baskets, telephones, a pencil sharpener, a pneumatic conveyor and piles of documents.

Across the room, beside one of the filing cabinets which had an open drawer, someone turned and looked at them in surprise. It was another biped, smaller and more faintly colored than Fritz. Of the other differences, the most notable was the organ in the middle of her forehead, which, unlike Fritz's, was developed into a large, egg-shaped red-purple ball or knob. "Now the surprise!" cried Dr. Grück. "Fritz, here stands Emma, your little wife!"

With a faint shriek, the other biped clapped her hands over her head and scurried out of the room, leaving a storm of dropped papers to settle behind her.

FRITZ sat in his relaxing chair, staring disconsolately out through the glass at the darkening air of the Zoo grounds. It was late afternoon. The Zoo was about to close, and the paths were almost deserted.

"That takes time," Dr. Grück had said heartily, patting him on the shoulder. "Rest, get acquainted, tomorrow is better. Fritz, good afternoon!"

Left alone, curious and vaguely excited, he had poked all around the work room, examining papers and opening drawers, then had wandered over to the doorway of the room into which Emma had disappeared. But no sooner had he put his nose timidly inside than her voice piped, "Go away! Go away, go away, go *away!*"

Since then there had been silence from the room next to his. At feeding time Wenzl had come in with a cart, had left one tray for him, another for Emma. But although he listened intently, he had not heard a sound of knife or fork, or a glass set down.

It was exciting to think of

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having another biped to talk to. It was not right for her to refuse to talk to him. Why should she want to make him miserable?

As he stared through the window, his eye met that of a dark-haired young man who had paused outside. The man was carrying a camera and looked vaguely familiar. Perhaps he had been one of the reporters. He was slight and stooped, with very pale, clear skin and large, soft eyes. As they looked wordlessly at each other, Fritz felt an abrupt slipping and sliding; the room whirled around him.

He struggled to get up from the floor. He could not understand what had happened to him, why it was suddenly so dark, why the room had grown so large. Then he squirmed up to hands and knees, and discovered that he was looking across an iron railing, through a window into a little lighted room in which a biped lay half sprawled in a chair, looking back at him with glazed eyes and making feeble motions with his arms.

The afternoon breeze was crisp and sibilant along the path. There were smells of damp earth and of animals. Gravel crunched beside him, and a courteous voice said, "Is anything wrong, good sir?"

The biped in the lighted room was floundering across the floor. Now he was beating with both hands on the glass, and his mouth opened and shut, opened and shut.

"You have dropped your camera," said the same voice. "Allow me." Someone's hands were patting him, with a curious muffled feeling, and he turned to glimpse a kindly, mustached face. Then something glittering was being thrust at him and he stared, with a kind of disbelieving wonder, as his hands closed automatically around the camera . . . his pink, hairy, five-fingered hands, with their pale fingernails.

II

DR. GRUCK was alone in his office, with some preliminary budget figures spread out on his desk, and the greasy remains of a knackwurst dinner on a little table beside him. Wearing his reading spectacles, he looked like a rosy, good-humored old uncle out of Dickens. His little blue eyes blinked mildly behind the spectacles, and when he counted, his sausage-fat thumb and fingers went *eins, zwei, drei.*

Humming, he turned a paper over. The melody he was humming was *I Lost My Sock in Lauterbach.*

The paneled room was warm, comfortable and silent. "And without my sock, I won't go

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home," hummed the Director.

The little desk visiphone flickered to life suddenly, and the tiny face in the screen said, "Doctor, if you please—"

Grück frowned slightly, and pressed the stud. "Yes, Freda?"

"Herr Wenzl wishes to speak with you, he says it is urgent."

"Well then, if it's urgent, Freda, put him on."

"Thank you, Doctor."

The screen flickered again. Wenzl's pale, fanatical face appeared. "Trouble with the new biped," he began immediately.

Grück took his glasses off, with fingers that fumbled. "The mischief!" he said. "What sort of trouble, Wenzl?"

"Ten minutes ago," said the head keeper precisely, "I was notified that Fritz was making a disturbance in his cage. I went there, and found he had been trying to break the window with a wooden chair."

"Terrible, but why?" cried Dr. Grück, his jowls wobbling.

"I endeavored to calm Fritz," continued Wenzl, "but he informed me that I was without authority over him, since he was not Fritz, but a journalist named Martin Naumchik."

Grück pursed his lips several times, unconsciously forming the syllable "Num." He found some papers under his hand, looked at them in surprise, then pushed them aside with hasty, abstracted motions.

"He also told me," said Wenzl, "that Fritz had gone off in his body, with his camera and all his clothes."

Grück put both palms on his cheeks and stared at Wenzl's image. In the little screen, Wenzl looked like a portrait doll made by someone with an unpleasant turn of fantasy. Full-sized, Wenzl was really not so bad. He had a mole, there were hairs in his nostrils, one saw his adam's apple move when he spoke. But at the size of a doll, he was unbearable.

"What steps have you taken?" Grück asked.

"Restraint," said Wenzl.

"And your opinion?"

"The animal is psychotic."

Grück closed his eyes, pinched the bridge of his nose between thumb and finger for a moment. He opened his eyes, settled himself before the desk. "Wenzl," he said, "the biped is not necessarily psychotic. In our ten years with Emma, we have also seen some little fits of nerves, not so? As for Fritz, possibly he is only frightened, being in a new Zoo. Perhaps he wants reassurance, to dramatize himself a little, who knows? Can you show me in the handbooks where it says a biped goes psychotic?"

Wenzl was silent and did not change expression.

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"No," said Grück. "So let's not be hasty, Wenzl. Remember that Fritz at present is our most valuable animal. Kindness, that does more than harsh words and beatings. A little sympathy, perhaps a smile —" He smiled, showing his small, blunt teeth as far back as the molars. "So, Wenzl? Yes?"

"You are always right, Doctor," said the head keeper sourly.

"Good, then we shall see. Go and talk to him reasonably, Wenzl; take off the jacket, and if he is calm, bring him to me."

"I WILL give you five reasons why I am Martin Naumchik," said the biped in a high, furious voice. His naked, green-spined body looked slender and fragile in the dark wooden chair. He leaned over the table toward Wenzl and Dr. Grück; his eyes were pink-rimmed, and the wide lipless mouth kept opening and closing.

"First. I know Berlin, whereas your menagerie animal has never been here before, and certainly never had liberty to roam the streets. Ask me anything you like. Second. I can tell you the names of the editor, managing editor and all the rest of the staff of *Paris-Soir,* I can repeat my last dispatch to them word for word, or nearly. If you give me a typewriter I'll even write it out. Third."

"But my dear Fritz —" said Grück, spreading his fat pink hands, with an ingratiating smile.

"Third," repeated the biped angrily. "My girl-friend, Julia Schorr, will vouch for me, she lives at number forty-one, Heinrichstrasse, flat seventeen, her visi number is UNter den Linden 8-7403, I can also tell you that she keeps a Siamese cat named Maggie and that she cooks very good spaghetti. My God, if it comes to that, I can tell you what kind of underclothing she wears. Fourth, you can examine me yourselves, I took a degree at the Sorbonne in 1999 — ask about literature, mathematics, history, whatever you like! Fifth and last, I *am* Martin Naumchik, I have always been Martin Naumchik, I never even saw this ridiculous biped of yours until today, and if you don't help me, I promise you, I'll make such a stench . . ."

He fell silent. "Well?"

Grück and Wenzl exchanged glances. "My dear young sir," said Grück, rumpling his untidy blond hair; his little eyes were squeezed together in a frown. "My dear young sir, you have convinced me, beyond any shadow of doubt—" the biped started eagerly—"that you believe yourself to be one Martin Naumchik, a human being, and a correspondent for *Paris-Soir,* and so on, and so on."

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The biped said in a choked voice, "Believe! But I've *told* you —"

"Please!" Grück held up his hand. "Have the politeness to listen. I say that there is no doubt, no *possible* doubt, that you believe in what you say. Very good! Now. Allow me to ask you this question." He folded his hands over his paunch, and his rosy lips shaped themselves into a smile.

"Suppose that you *are* Martin Naumchik." He waved his hand generously. "Go on. Suppose it, I make no objection. Very well, now you are Martin Naumchik. What is the result?"

He leaned forward and stared earnestly at the biped. Wenzl, beside him, was grimly silent.

"Why, you release me," said the biped uncertainly. "You help me find that animal who has got into my body, and somehow — in some way —"

"Yes?" said Dr. Grück encouragingly. "Somehow — in some way —"

"There must be some way," said the biped miserably.

Grück leaned back, shaking his head. "To make you change around again? My dear young sir, reflect a moment on what you are saying. To put a man's mind back in his body after it has gone into the body of an animal? Let's not be children! The thing is impossible, to begin with! You know it as well as I do! Supposing that it has actually happened once, still it's just as impossible as before! My dear young sir! To put a man's mind back in his body? How? With a funnel?"

The biped was leaning his head on his green-spined hand. "If we could find out why it happened —" he muttered.

"Good, yes," said Grück sympathetically. "A very good suggestion: that is what we must do, by all means. Courage, Fritz, or Martin, as the case may be! This will take time, we must be prepared to wait. Patience and courage, eh, Fritz?"

The biped nodded, looking exhausted.

"Good, then it's understood," said Grück cheerfully, getting up. "We shall do everything we can, you may be quite sure of that, and in the meantime —" he motioned toward Wenzl, who had also risen — "a little cooperation, no trouble for poor Wenzl. Agreed, Fritz?"

"You're going to keep me here? On display?" cried the biped, stiffening again with indignation.

"For the present," said Grück soothingly. "After all, what choice have we got? To begin with, where would you go? How would you live? Slowly, we must go

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slowly, Fritz. Take an older man's advice, haste can be the ruin of everything. Slowly, slowly, Fritz, patience and courage—"

Wenzl took the biped's slender arm and began to guide him out of the room. "My name is Martin Naumchik," he muttered weakly as he disappeared.

THE dim gray light of early morning flooded the outer rooms, illuminating everything but emphasizing nothing. For some reason — the biped had noticed it before — it made you see the undersides of things more than usual, the loose dingy cloth hanging under the seat of a chair, the grime and dust in corners, the ordinarily inconspicuous streaks, smears, scratches.

He prowled restlessly down the corridor, past the closed doorway of the next room — the female had apparently up-ended a table against it — into the fluorescent-lit office space with its hooded machines, then back again. In his own inner room he caught sight of an ugly face in the mirror — greenish and flat-muzzled, like an impossible hybrid of dog and cock — and for a horrible instant did not realize it was his own.

He clutched at the wall and began to weep. Strangled, inhuman sounds came out of his throat.

Ten hours, ten hours or more, it must be. Just around supper time it had happened, and now it was past dawn. Ten hours, and he still wasn't used to it, it was harder to bear than ever.

He had to get out.

The biped's little valise was standing on the floor of the inner room near the washbowl. He pounced on it, ripped it open, flung the contents around. Toothbrush, chess set, some cheap writing paper, a dog-eared paperbound book called *Brecht's Planet: Riddle of the Universe;* nothing useful. Weeping, he ran into the office room and snatched up the telephone receiver. The line was still dead. Probably it was not linked into the zoo switchboard this early in the morning. What else?

He caught sight of one of the typewriters, stopped in surprise, then sat down before it and took the cover off.

There was paper in a drawer. He rolled a sheet into the platen, switched the machine on, and sat for a moment anxiously gripping his three-fingered hands together.

The words took shape in his mind: *My name is Martin Naumchik. I am being held prisoner in . . .*

His hands stabbed at the keyboard, and the type bars piled up against the guide with a clatter and a snarl; the carriage

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jumped over and the paper leaped up a space.

The pain of realization was so great that he instinctively tried to bit his lip. He felt the stiff flesh move numbly, sliding against his teeth. Biting his lip was one of the things he could not do now. And typing was another.

It was too much. He would never get used to it. He would always forget, and be snubbed up like an animal at the end of a chain . . .

After a moment, half-blinded by tears, he pried at the jammed keys until they fell back. Then, painfully, picking out the letters with one finger, he began again: "My name is M . . ."

In half an hour, he had finished his account of the facts. Next it would be necessary to establish his identity. Perhaps that should come first, or the story would never even be read. He took a fresh sheet, and wrote:

M. Frédéric Stein
PARIS-SOIR
98, rue de la Victoire
Paris 9e (Seine)

Dear Frédéric:

You will know the enclosed is really from me by the following: When I was last in Paris, you and I went to the Rocking Horse and got tanked on mint whistles. There were three greenies in the jug. You told me about certain troubles with your wife, and we discussed your taking a correspondent's job in the Low Countries.

This is not a joke; I need your help — in God's name, do whatever

He paused, and over the machine's hum was lucky enough to hear the whisper of footsteps in the corridor. He had barely time to turn off the machine, cover it and hide the typed pages in a drawer.

A young keeper with a sullen, pimpled face came in, wheeling a cart with two steaming trays. It was breakfast time.

His first day as a caged animal was about to begin.

III

HERE in the middle of the city, the streets were as bright as if it were day. Over the tesselated pavements people were wandering. Music drifted seductively from an open doorway; all the scarlet blossoms of the Antarean air-weed, clinging to the sides of the buildings, were open and exuding a fresh pungence.

In one of the brilliant display windows, as he passed, the young man saw a row of green creatures in glass cages — sluggish globular animals about the size of a tomato, with threads of limbs and great dull green eyes. They floated on the green-scummed surface of the shallow water in

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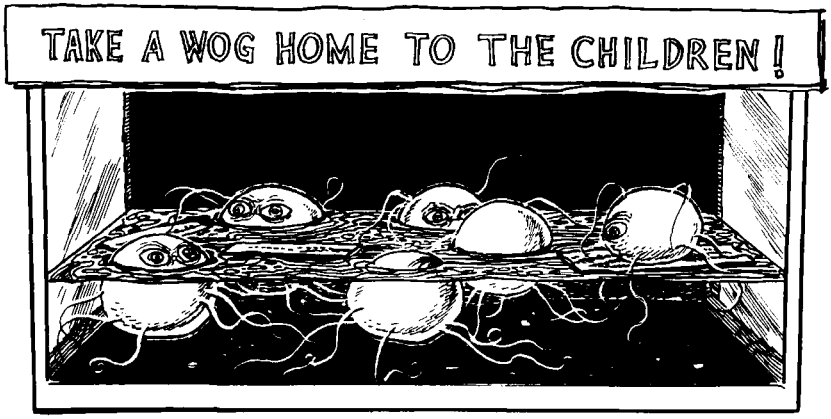

the cages, or climbed feebly on bits of wet bark. Over them was a streamer: TAKE A WOG HOME TO THE CHILDREN.

He passed on. The people around him, moving in groups and couples for the most part, were a different sort than he was used to seeing at the Zoo in Hamburg. They were better dressed, better fed, their skins were clearer and redder and they laughed more. The women were confections of white-blonde hair and red cheeks, with sparkling white teeth and flashing nails, and they wore puffed, shining garments like the glittering paper around an expensive gift. The men were more austere in dark, dull reds and blues. Their feet were thinly shod in gleaming patent leather, and their hair shone with pomade. Their talk, in the unfamiliar Berlin accent, eddied around him: confident tones, good humor, barks of laughter.

Very faintly, beneath his feet, the star mosaic of the pavement shook to the passage of an express car underneath. Here in the above-ground everyone was on foot. There was no wheeled vehicle in sight, not even an aircar: only the bright thread of one of the Flugbahnen visible in the distance.

Around the corner, in a little square surrounding the heroic anodized aluminum figure of a man in spaceman's dress, helmet off, an exultant expression on his metal face, the young man saw a tall illuminated panel on the side of a building. Luminous words were shuddering slowly down the panel, line by line. The young man moved closer, through

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the loose crowd of bystanders, and read:

INTERPLANET LINER
CRASHES ON MARS;
ALL BELIEVED DEAD
Passenger list to follow

MOVING-MACHINE
THIEVES COMMIT
ANOTHER
OUTRAGE IN BERLIN
"Will be brought to justice,"
vows Funk

HIGH ASSEMBLY VOTES
TO ANNEX
THIESSEN'S PLANT
Vote is 1150 for to 139 against

SPACE STOCKS CLOSE AT
RECORD HIGH
Society for Spaceflight, I.C.S.S.A.
lead advance

READ FULL DETAILS IN
THE BERLINER ZEITUNG

The letters drifted down, like tongues of cold flame, and were followed by an advertisement for Heineken's beer.

The young man turned away, having read all the headlines with appreciation but without any interest whatever; he walked further down the street and gazed in fascination at the marquée of a cinema, where through some illusion brightly-colored ten-foot figures of men and women seemed to be dancing. Even here he could not give his full attention. He was bothered, and increasingly so, by certain demands of his body.

HE HAD an insistent urge to tear off the muffling, unfamiliar garments he was wearing, but realized it would attract attention to himself, and besides, this bald body would probably be cold. He had not realized that a simple thing like this could become so difficult. At home in the zoo he had had his own little w.c., and that was that. People must have theirs, but where? What did people do who were strangers in Berlin? He looked around. He did not see a policeman, but a woman who was passing with her escort paused, looking at him, and on an impulse he stepped forward and said politely, "Pardon me, madam, but can you direct me to the w.c.?"

Her face registered first surprise, then shock, and she turned to her companion saying angrily, "Come on, he's drunk." They walked rapidly away, the man's scowling face turned over his shoulder. The word "Disgraceful!" floated back.

Surprised and hurt, the young man stood for a moment watching them out of sight; then he turned in the opposite direction.

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The place he was passing now was called "Konstantin's Café." The sight of people sitting at table, visible through the big window, reminded him that he was hungry and thirsty. After a moment's hesitation, he went in.

A slender red-jacketed waiter met him alertly in the foyer. "Yes, sir? A table for one?"

"Yes, if you like," said the young man. The waiter hesitated, glancing at him oddly, then turned through the archway. "Come this way, sir."

The young man gave his surcoat and camera to a girl who asked for them. Inside, waiters in red jackets were moving like ants among the snowy tabletops; the room was crowded with rich silks and velvets of all colors, flushed clean faces, smiling mouths; unfamiliar smells of food swam in the air. The thick carpet muffled all footsteps, but there was a heavy burden of voices, clattering silverware, and music from some invisible source.

A little intimidated by so much crowded luxury, the young man followed the waiter to a small table and sat down.

The waiter opened a stiff pasteboard folder with a snap and presented it; the young man took it automatically, and in a moment perceived that it was a list of foods.

"To begin with, an apéritif, sir?" asked the waiter. "Some hors-d'oeuvres? Or shall we say a salad?"

The young man blinked at the menu, then set it down. "No," he replied, "but—"

"Just the dinner, then, sir," said the waiter briskly. "If the gentleman will permit, I recommend the truite au beurre canopéen, with a Moselle, very good, sir."

"All right," the young man said hesitantly, "but first—"

"Ah, an apéritif, after all?" asked the waiter, smiling with annoyance. "Some hors-d'oeuvres? Or—"

"No, I don't wish any of those, thank you," said the young man, making a clumsy gesture and oversetting a goblet.

"But then, what is it that the gentleman wishes?" The waiter righted the goblet, brushed at the tablecloth, stood back.

The young man blinked slowly. "I wish for you to direct me to the w.c., if you would be so kind."

HE half expected the waiter to react like the woman in the street, but the man's keen face only closed expressionlessly, and he leaned down to murmur, "The doorway behind the curtain at the rear, sir."

"Thank you, you are very kind."

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"Not at *all*, sir." The waiter went away. The young man got up and went in the indicated direction. Although he tried to move carefully, he was still very clumsy in his body, and sometimes would forget and pause between steps to try and shake off one of his shoes. When he did this, he noticed that some of the diners looked at him strangely. He determined to break the habas soon as possible.

When he returned, after some trouble with the unfamiliar fastenings, the waiter was just removing from a little silver cart a covered platter, which he placed on the table and unveiled with a flourish. The young man sat down. The waiter took a slender bottle from the cart, uncorked it, poured a pale liquid into the goblet and stood back expectantly.

The young man looked at his plate.

The food steamed gently; there were five or six different things, each of its own color, beautifully arranged on the platter. He had never seen any of them before, except possibly in magazines, and all the smells were unfamiliar. Nevertheless, he picked up his fork and pried at the largest object, a roughly oval burnt-brown mass which came away flakily, running with juices. He put the fork in his mouth on the second try. The food was a moist, unpleasant lump on his tongue: the taste was so startling that he immediately turned his head and spat it out.

The waiter looked down at the carpet, then at the young man. Then he went away.

The young man was gingerly trying some light green strips, which he found unusual but palatable, when the waiter came back. "Sir, the manager would like to speak with you, if you please." He gestured toward the foyer.

"Oh? With me?" The young man stood up agreeably, oversetting the goblet again. The pale liquid ran over the tablecloth and began to drip onto the carpet. "I am so sorry," he said, and began to mop at it with his napkin.

"It's of no consequence," said the waiter grimly, and took the young man by the arm. "If you *please*, sir."

In the foyer they met another waiter, who took his other arm. Someone handed him his surcoat and camera. Together the two waiters began to propel him toward the exit.

The young man craned his head around. "The manager?" he asked.

"The manager," said the first waiter, "wishes you to leave quietly, without disturbance, sir."

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"But I haven't yet paid for my food," said the young man.

"There is no charge, sir," said the waiter, and they were at the door. The two gave him a last push. He was in the street.

IN THE men's room of a pfennig gallery, a little later (at least he was becoming adept at finding w.c.'s), the young man was examining the contents of his pockets. He discovered that he was Martin Naumchik, European citizen, born Asnieres (Seine) 1976, complexion fair, eyes brown, hair brown, no arrest record, no curtailment of citizenship, no identifying marks or scars, employed by Paris-Soir, 98 rue de la Victoire, Paris (9e); that he had a driver's license, a Cordon Bleu diner's card, a press card in five languages and a notebook full of penciled scribbling which he could not read. In his billfold were forty marks, and in the pockets of his trousers, jacket and surcoat some coins amounting to another two or three marks. That was all, except some ticket stubs, a key on a gold ring, tissues, pocket lint, a half-empty pack of cigarettes, and a crumpled envelope, addressed to Herr Martin Naumchik, 67, Gastnerstrasse, Berlin.

The young man had partially satisfied his hunger with two sausages on rolls, bought at a stall near the gallery, but he was tired, lonely and bewildered. At that moment he would have been glad to go back to the Zoo, but he had lost his directions and did not know where it was. He left the gallery and moved on down the street.

The cinema beckoned to him with the open wings of its lobby and the gigantic displays on either side: figures of men and women, glossy leaves, planets floating in a violet-gray sky. Illuminated signs announced:

Experience new sensations!
Unprecedented excitement!

UNDER SEVEN MOONS
Stella Pain — Willem DeGroot
"Indescribable!" —
Tageblatt.

The price was two marks ten. The young man paid, took his ticket and went in. A few people were standing about in the anteroom, talking and smoking. There were exotic fruits and confections for sale at a long counter, and rows of automatic machines for drinks, candy, tissues. The young man gave his ticket to the turnstile machine at the door, got a stub back and found himself in a huge well of darkened seats, lit only by faint glimmers from the distant walls. Here and there around the vast bowl,

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clumps of people were sitting. Three-quarters of the seats were empty. There was very little noise, no one was talking or moving, evidently the show had not yet begun. The young man groped his way down the aisle, chose a seat and unfolded it. The instant he settled down and put his hands on the armrests, sound and motion exploded around him.

HE sprang up convulsively, into darkness and silence. The huge almost empty bowl of the theater was just as it had been before: the flashing phantom shapes he had seen were nowhere.

After a moment, cautiously, he touched one of the armrests again. Nothing happened. The other armrest. Still nothing. Gingerly and with trepidation, he unfolded the seat and lowered himself into it.

Again the sudden blast of light and sound. This time he glimpsed figures, heard words spoken before he leaped upright again.

All around him, the people were sitting in eerie, intent silence. Then this must be how one saw a movie — not projected on a wall, as he had always imagined, but somehow mysteriously existing when one sat in the chair. Shaking with nervousness, but determined not to be a coward, he sat down one more and gripped the armrests hard.

Light and sensation surrounded him. He was seeing the upper portions of two gigantic humans, a female and a male, against a violet sky in which two moons shone dimly. Simultaneously there was a grinding, insistent roar of wind and the man's stentorian voice bellowed out, "Gerda, you are mine!" His face stared into hers, his strong brown hands gripped her bare arms while she replied, "I know it, Friedrich." The words crashed into the young man's eardrums like bombs. The two immense bodies were not far away, at the end of the theater, but loomed before him almost close enough to touch. They glowed with color, not a natural color but something altogether different and arresting, luminous pastel tones overlying shadows of glowing darkness, with a rather disturbing suggestion of dead black in all the outlines, almost like a colored engraving. They had depth but not reality, and yet they were incredibly more than mere pictures. The young man realized, with a shock of surprise, that he could smell the cold salt air, and that without knowing in the least how, he was aware of the very *texture* of the giant woman's skin — smooth and waxy, like a soft artificial fruit — and of the cat-smelling tawny softness of her long blonde hair whipping in the wind, and

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the hard-edged glossy stiffness of the green leaves in the near background.

"Gerda!" roared the man.

"Friedrich!" she trumpeted sadly.

Then without moving a muscle the two of them vertiginously receded, as if an invisible car were drawing them rapidly away, and as they dwindled, standing and staring at one another, green-leaved shrubs gathered in to fill the space, and the sky somehow grew bigger — there were *three* moons drifting with a perceptible motion through the violet sky — and at that moment with a thunderous rushing sound, the rain began. Dry as he sat there, the young man could feel the streaming wetness pelting the leaves; it was lukewarm. Music skirled up in wild dissonances, lightning cracked the sky apart and thunder boomed.

It was too much.

The young man stood up, trembling all over. Sight, touch and sound vanished instantly. He was alone in the vast theater with the silent, motionless people who sat in darkness.

He moved shakily to the aisle and went out, grateful for the quiet and the sense of being alone in his skin again. He was sorry to have given up so quickly, but consoled himself with the thought that it was his first time. Later, perhaps, he would grow used to it.

AT A kiosk in the middle of the street, newspapers and magazines were on sale in metal dispensers. Beside this stood a dirty small boy and an old gray woman, with a portable teleset tuned to a popular singer. The little boy was singing harmony with him, badly, in a strained soprano. There were coins scattered on the little folding table in front of the teleset. Further along, two drunken and dishevelled men were scuffing ineffectually, grabbing at each other's surcoats for balance. A brightly painted woman giggled, but most people paid no attention. Three dark young men walked by abreast, scowling, with identical dark long surcoats and oiled forelocks. Tall cold-light signs over the buildings blinked, MOBIL. TELEFUNKEN, KRUPP-FARBEN. The young man moved through the crowd, listening to the voices and the snatches of music from open doorways, looking at faces, pausing to stare at the glittering merchandise in shop windows.

When he had been walking in the same direction for some time, he came upon a store which seemed to fill an entire square of its own, with many busy entrances and rows of brilliantly

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lighted display windows. The name, in tall cold-light letters over each entrance, was "ELEKTRA." For want of any other direction, the young man drifted in with the crowd.

Inside, the store appeared to be one gigantic room, high-ceilinged, echoing, glittering everywhere with reflected lights. Banks of brightly illuminated display cases were ranged in parallel lines, leaving aisles between. In open spaces were statues, great flowering plants, constructions of golden and white metal. The murmuring of the crowd washed back from the distant ceiling: up there, the young man noticed, were fiery trails of light, red, green, blue, amber, that pulsed and seemed to travel along the ceiling like the exhausts of rockets. The air was heavy with women's mingled scents and with other, unidentifiable odors; there was quiet music in the background, and a faint, multiple clicking or clattering sound.

The young man went in tentatively, listening and watching. A woman and an older man were standing by the entrance to one of the aisles, arguing vehemently in low, crisp voices; the young man caught the words, "Twenty millions at the minimum." A child in a red coat was crying, being dragged along by an angry woman. A man in dark-blue uniform went hurrying by, the trousers snapping about his ankles.

There were signs in colored lights on the ceiling; one red one said "MEN'S WEAR" and a red trail went pulsing off from it; another, blue, said "WATCHES AND JEWELRY"; another, green, "CAMERAS."

The young man followed the green trail, fascinated. Lines of people, most of them women, were moving slowly along the row of showcases. Here and there, the young man saw someone put money into one of the cases, open the glass front and take out a blouse or an undergarment, a pair of stockings, a scarf.

The young man had never seen so many beautiful things in one place. Here he was now in a whole corridor lined with nothing but cameras, hundreds of cameras, all achingly polished and bright; the winking reflections from their round eyes of metal and glass followed him as he walked. He actually saw a man buy one: a huge thing, big as the man's head, with pale leather sides and a complexity of lens tubes, dials, meters. The man held it reverently in his hands, staring at it as if at a loved one's face. As the glass door closed, a mechanism slowly

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revolved and another camera, just like the first, descended to fill the empty case. As the customer walked away, the young man looked at the price on the chrome rim of the showcase: it was 700 marks. He looked again at the beautiful camera behind the glass door, then at the one which hung around his neck. It was smaller and the metal was not so bright; the black sides were worn in places, and it did not look so beautiful as it had before. The young man walked on, looking down at himself, and was aware that his dark surcoat was worn thin at the cuffs, his shoes needed polishing, there was lint and dust on his trousers.

So, then, it was not enough to be a human being! One must also have money. The young man vaguely supposed that if he had 700 marks, his head would not ache so, he would not have the uncomfortable feeling in his insides that was bothering him more and more, he would not be tired and irritable.

But he had not the least idea how people got money.

TO make himself feel better, he stopped in the next section and bought a wristwatch with an expanding platinum band. He put a ten-mark bill into the slot. The mechanism hummed and gripped the ten marks, pulling it gradually inside until it was all gone; then ther was a clatter in the receptacle underneath, and the glass door swung open. The young man took out his watch and admired it. The marvelous thing was already running, the second hand sweeping silently around the black dial. He put it on his wrist, first the wrong way around, then the right way. In the receptacle were twenty-seven pfennigs in silver and copper. He scooped them up. Above, the mechanism was revolving and another wristwatch came into view. The young man found that he could not resist it. He put another ten marks into the machine, receiving another wristwatch and another twenty-seven pfennigs in change. He put the second watch on his other wrist. Now he felt rich and handsome. He held out his arms stiffly, to make the cuffs of his sleeves slide back so that he could admire his watches. Both showed the identical time: 20 hours 13 minutes. Now he would always be sure what time it was, because if the two watches showed different times he would know one was wrong, but if the same time, then they must be right.

Feeling pleased to have worked this out for himself, and to have made so sound a purchase, he went on. In an open

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space at the end of the aisle, he saw curved escalators rising in spirals past the ceiling, and beyond them, banks of elevators with doors that constantly opened and shut: click, a door was open, someone stepped in, click, the door closed, and in an instant it had whisked its passenger off and was open again.

Diagonally across the open space, he caught sight of another group of illuminated trails on the ceiling, and it seemed to him that one of them was labeled "Foods." He went that way eagerly, and nearly knocked down a hatless man in blue uniform, who frowned at him and said, "I beg your pardon, sir."

"No, I beg *your* pardon."

"Not at all, sir."

"It's very kind of you."

"An honor, sir."

They both bowed and went on their way. The young man found that the sign did say "Foods." He followed its pink trail until he came to a sunken area full of people with metal carts, and the carts loaded with packages. He went down the five or six steps, sniffing the air, and found a new set of lighted trails that pointed to "Canned Goods," "Perishables," "Meats" and so on. Passing through "Canned Goods," he came upon a stout man in a plaid surcoat who was lifting a can out of an open case and putting it on top of three others just like it in a cart.

The young man paused to watch.

The mechanism inside the case slowly revolved; another large, odd-shaped can came down into view, and now the young man could see that it was labeled "COPENHAGEN SMOKED HAM," with a picture of a slab of pink meat. The cover of the display case was still open. As soon as the mechanism stopped, the stout man reached in, took out the canned ham, and put it in his cart along with the other four. The mechanism began to revolve again. The stout buyer glanced over his shoulder at the young man, hesitated, then took out a sixth ham and put it with the other five. The mechanism revolved again. As far as the young man could make out, the stout man had not put in any money. Each time he removed a ham, the door swung down but did not latch. Then the stout man lifted it up again and reached for the next ham.

THE buyer looked around again, glanced from side to side, and muttered, "Go on, get away, can't you see I'm busy?"

"I'm sorry," said the young man politely, "but I only wanted to be next for the hams."

The stout customer growled

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something, trying to look at the next ham and at the young man simultaneously.

"Pardon?"

"I said devil's dirt," the stout man growled more distinctly. The mechanism stopped; he reached in and took the seventh ham.

At that moment one of the blue-uniformed men appeared at the end of the aisle. The stout customer was holding the ham close to his chest. The blue-uniformed man turned toward them.

The stout customer wheeled abruptly, thrust the ham into the young man's arms, said petulantly, "Here, then," and walked rapidly away.

"One moment, please!" called the approaching blue-uniformed man.

Still moving rapidly away, and without turning his head, the stout man said something that sounded like, "Run, you fool!"

The man in the blue uniform took something out of his pocket. It was an electric bell, which began to ring insistently and loudly. Inside the display case, the mechanism was revolving, presenting another canned ham. The young man looked at it, then at the one he held, and felt a vague alarm. The stout man was moving faster; the one in blue uniform was waving and shouting. The young man turned and began to run, although he did not know why.

At the front of the food section, another blue-uniformed man was coming toward him from the left. The young man scrambled up the five steps, holding the canned ham awkwardly to his chest. The stout man was nowhere in sight.

"Stop!" called one of the blue-uniformed men. But the young man's heart was beating in unreasonable panic. He ran across the open space, dodging back and forth between shoppers' carts, pursued by shouts and the ringing of the bell. Another bell began to ring, somewhere off to his right, then a third. Utterly terrified, unaware of what he was doing, the young man dropped the ham on the floor and ran at a woman with a full cart, who shrieked and pushed it into another cart, oversetting both and spilling oranges like quicksilver on the floor. The young man ran past her, nearly falling, and found himself between two advancing men in blue, while before him was only a decorative grille of arabesques in gold-plated metal, which reached all the way to a balcony on the second level. With a gasp of fright, the young man flung himself at this grille and began to limb it. In spite of the clumsiness of his feet, which would not grip

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and could not even feel the metal, he was above the men's heads in a moment, and they shook their fists at him, shouting, "Despicable ruffian, come down here!"

The young man kept on climbing. Shortly, the people on the floor below were colorful dolls, many with faces turned to look up at him. One of the blue-uniformed men had begun to climb the grille, but now the young man was almost at the top.

He arrived at the top of the grille, and reaching up, found that he could grasp the railing of the balcony and swing himself up and over. Panting with exertion, he found himself in a narrow corridor, lined on the wall side with open doorways from which came the sounds of voices and the clicking of machines. A man stepped out of a doorway some distance down the corridor and craned his neck to listen to the sound of the bells. He turned, saw the young man. "Hi!" he called, starting forward.

THE young man ran again. Faces turned, startled, inside the rooms as he passed; he caught glimpses of men and women in their blouse sleeves, of desks and office equipment. The next door was closed and was marked "Stair." The young man opened it, hesitated briefly between two narrow flights, then chose the up flight and went bounding up, three steps at a time, swinging around at each tiny landing until he grew dizzy. Below, voices echoed. He kept on going up past other landings and closed, dark doors, narrower and dingier, until he reached the top. The stairs ended at one last door, lit only by a grimy skylight through which filtered a dim violet glow.

The young man paused to listen. Deep down, there were tiny voices, like the chirping of insects under layer after layer of earth.

He opened the door and went in. He was on a floor of empty rooms, dark and gray with dust. Everything was much older and shabbier-looking than the glittering aisles downstairs. In the weak light from small pebble-glass windows, he saw goods piled in the corners of one room, a neglected huddle of filing cabinets in another. There was no one here. No one had come here for a long time.

At the end of the hall, half hidden by an ancient wardrobe, was another door, another stair, the narrowest and darkest of all — plain bare wood, that creaked under his steps as he went up. It was only one short flight, and at the top he found himself in a tiny room with slanting walls.

Bundles of papers lay piled on

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the floor, yellow and brittle under their coating of dust. There was a length of rope, an old light bulb or two, some shredded bits of paper that might have been gnawed by small animals. All this he saw in the dim, cool light from a triangular window under the peak of the roof. It was a wide window, framed in old ornate moulding that filled almost the entire wall, and from it, when he had rubbed a clear space with his hand, he could see the city spread out below him.

Silent and empty it lay under the violet sky, all the buildings peacefully ranked one beyond another out to the misty horizon. Some of the building faces were illuminated by the glow of the avenues, but no sound came up from those lower levels. It was like a deserted city, whose inhabitants had gone away leaving all the lights on. The luminous strand of a Flugbahn hung empty against the sky. In the twilight the letters of sky-signs stared coldly: MOBIL, URANIA, IBM, ALT WIEN.

The young man looked around him with calm satisfaction.

He was still hungry and in bodily distress, but here he was safe and sheltered. With those papers he could make a bed, here by the window. He would look out at the world all day, as long as he wished, and no one would know he was here at all.

He sat down and let his muscles relax. After all, to be free and to have a place of one's own were what mattered most. He had been terribly frightened, but now he could see that it was all coming right in the end.

With a contented glance around at the dim, slanting walls, which already had the comforting familiarity of home, he lay down on the floor and let the slow waves of silence muffle him to sleep.

IV

THE food in the tray turned out to be a steaming mess of something dark green and odorous, the consistency of mud, with chunks of fibrous substance mixed up in it.

The biped was hungry, but repelled by the unappetizing appearance and smell of the stuff, and did not touch any. Next door he heard the scrape of a spoon on the metal plate: the female was eating hers, anyhow. The keeper had removed the table from her doorway and lectured her severely. He had not heard what she replied, if anything. The biped tried to sip water from the bowl on his tray, found that his stiff mouth would not permit it, and dashed the bowl to the floor with a sudden howl

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of fury. Immediately afterward he grew thirsty, and filled the bowl again from the washbowl faucet. He tried lapping the water with his tongue, and got some relief that way, but not enough water to swallow. He ended by pouring water into his open mouth, half choking himself before he discovered the trick of throwing his head back to swallow.

His chest and legs were sodden, the feathery spines clumped together with moisture. He felt acutely uncomfortable until he had dried himself with a towel. For some reason, the trivial incident depressed him severely. He tried to cheer himself up by thinking of the unfinished letter hidden in the desk, but to his despair found that he no longer cared about it. He sat in the inner room and stared dully at the wall.

He was roused from his torpor by footsteps in the office space, and Grück's cheerful voice calling, "Fritz! Emma!" The pimpled young keeper came in, looked at his untouched tray and removed it without comment.

The biped got up, simply because it would have required more resolution to stay where he was. He followed the keeper into the office space.

The keeper was showing the tray to Grück and Wenzl, who stood side by side, Grück ample in brown broadcloth, Wenzl narrow in his white smock. "Nothing eaten, sirs."

Wenzl glared, but Grück said expansively, "Never mind, never mind! Take it away, Rudi — this morning our guest is not so hungry, it's natural! Now!" He rubbed his fat pink hands together, beaming. "But where is our beautiful Emma?" He turned. "Emma?"

The female was in the doorway of her room, peeping out, only one side of her face visible. At Grück's command she advanced a few steps, then hesitated. Her arms were raised, both hands clasped tightly over her forehead, hiding the knob.

"But, Emma," said Grück reproachfully, "is this our hospitality? When were we ever so impolite? And our friend's first day, too!"

She made a wordless sound, looking at the biped.

"You are alarmed, Emma, he frightens you?" Grück asked, looking from one to another. "Ah, loveling, there is nothing to be frightened of. You are going to be great friends — yes, you will see! And besides, Emma, what about all the work that is here?"

The female spoke up unexpectedly, in a thin, absurdly human voice. "Take him away, please, and I'll do it all myself, Herr

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Doktor." She glanced toward the biped, then ducked her head.

"No, no, Emma, that is not right. But let me tell you something. Because you are so alarmed, so frightened, we want you to be happy, Emma, we are going to do something to relieve this fear. (Wenzl, some chalk.) Fritz shall stay and help you with the work —"

"No, no."

"Yes, yes! And you will like it, wait and see. (The chalk, Wenzl — ha!)" Wenzl had spoken sharply to Rudi, the pimpled young keeper, who, blushing, had fumbled in his pockets and produced a piece of pink chalk. Wenzl, snatching it, now handed it to Grück.

"See here, Emma," said Grück soothingly, "we are going to draw a line on the floor. I draw it myself, because I want you to be happy — so . . ." Bending with a grunt, he began at the wall between the two bedroom doors and drew a wavering chalk line across the room, separating it into two roughly equal parts.

"Now," he said from the far side, straightening up in panting triumph, "see here, Emma, on this side, Fritz stays. Correct, Fritz?"

"Whatever you like," said the biped indifferently.

"See, he gives me his promise," said Grück, with emphasis. "And my promise to you, Emma. So long as he stays on his side of the room, you will work on your side, and not be frightened. But if he should cross over the line, Emma, then you have *my permission* to be frightened again, and to run into your room and bar the door! Understood?"

The female seemed impressed. "Very well then, Herr Doktor," she said at last.

"Good!" ejaculated Grück. He rubbed his hands together, beaming. "Now, what else is left?" He looked around the room. "Wenzl, move one of those typewriters so that Fritz has one to use. And some of the work, also, on this side — not too much for Fritz, I'm sure Emma works much faster! Good, good." He started to leave, followed by Wenzl and the young keeper. "Until next time, then, Emma, Fritz!"

The door closed.

THE biped made as if to sit down at his desk. At his first movement Emma flinched back, jaw gaping in fright, hands over her knob. This startled the biped, who said irritably, "I'm not going to hurt you."

"Don't speak to me," the female said faintly. She clutched her knob. Her body was trembling all over, slightly but perceptibly.

The biped, trying to ignore her

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involuntary starts and shrieks, moved to the desk and sat down. He took the cover off his machine, looked at the heap of dictaphone spools in the *in* basket, then opened the desk drawer and quickly glanced inside to make sure his letter was there. By this time, the female was in the doorway of her room, poised for further flight.

Under her horrified gaze, the biped did not dare take his unfinished letter out of the drawer. He picked up the first dictaphone spool, inserted it in the machine, put the earphones on his head and began to listen.

A sudden loud noise in his ears made him jump and tear off the earphones. After a moment he turned down the volume and cautiously tried again. A voice was speaking faintly; he recognized it as Grück's, but could not make out the words. He turned the spool back to "start." The abrupt sound came again, and this time he realized that it was Grück clearing his throat.

He turned up the volume. Grück's voice was saying, "Attention, Emma! Here is tape number two of *Some Aspects of Extra-Terrestrial Biology*. Begin. Bibliography. Birney, R. C. Bay-ee-air-en-eh-ipsilon, Emma. *Phylum and genus in the Martian biota. Journal of comparative physiology*, 1985, 50, 162 to 167. Bulev, M. I. Bay-oo-ell-eh-fow, Emma. Remember, not with *vay* again, as last time! A preliminary study of *natator veneris schultzii. Dissertation abstracts*, 1990, 15, 1652 to 1653. Cooper, J. G. . . ."

The biped irritably removed the earphones and switched off the machine. The earphones did not press hard on his small external ears, but they felt unfamiliar and made him nervous.

The female had moved out a few steps from her doorway, but when he glanced up, she backed away hastily.

The biped swore. After a moment, reluctantly, he turned the dictaphone spool back to the beginning and put the earphones on again. He rolled paper into the typewriter carriage, then switched on the dictaphone and began trying to type as he listened. But in the first few words he typed there were so many errors that he ripped the paper out and threw it in the wastebasket.

There was a stifled shriek from the female, who had advanced halfway across the room. Clutching her knob, she retreated two steps.

"Don't look at me!" she piped.

"Then don't shriek," said the biped, annoyed. He rolled another sheet into the machine.

"I wouldn't shriek, if you only wouldn't look at me."

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He glanced up. "How can I help looking at you if you shriek?"

Except for another piping sound, more a gasp than a scream, she made no reply. The biped went back to work. Touching one key at a time with painful care, he managed to get through five entries in the bibliography before making an error.

He threw the pages away and started over once more.

TIME passed. At length he was aware that the female had crossed the room to her desk. He concentrated on his work, and did not look up. After a few minutes, he heard the clatter of her machine. Her typing was smooth and rapid; the carriage banged against the stop, banged back, and reeled off another line.

Angrily, the biped hit a key too hard and it repeated. He ripped the page out.

"You are spoiling all your work," she said.

He glanced up — her hands leaped to her knob — he looked down again. "I can't help it if I am," he said.

"Weren't you taught to type properly?"

"No. I mean yes." The biped clenched his three-fingered fists in frustration. "I know how to type, but this animal doesn't. I can't make his hands work."

She stared at him with her mouth slightly open. It was plain that she did not understand a word.

The biped growled angrily and went back to his work. After a moment he heard the clatter of Emma's machine begin again.

For a long time neither spoke. Keeping at it grimly, in the next hour the biped managed to complete a page. He took it from the machine and put it into his *out* basket with a feeling of triumph. Glancing over at the female's desk, he was a little disconcerted to note that her *out* basket was heaped with typescript and dictaphone spools, while her *in* basket was empty.

His back and his hands ached from the unaccustomed work. He felt weary and dejected again. How was he going to finish the letter, the all-important letter, while the female was constantly in the same room? Perhaps if he deliberately frightened her once again . . .

The thought ended as he heard the outer door open. Emma looked up expectantly. The clatter of her machine ceased. She covered the machine in two deft movements and stood up.

In walked Grück, beaming and nodding; then Wenzl, grim as ever; finally the pimply keeper with his cart.

Grück's expression changed

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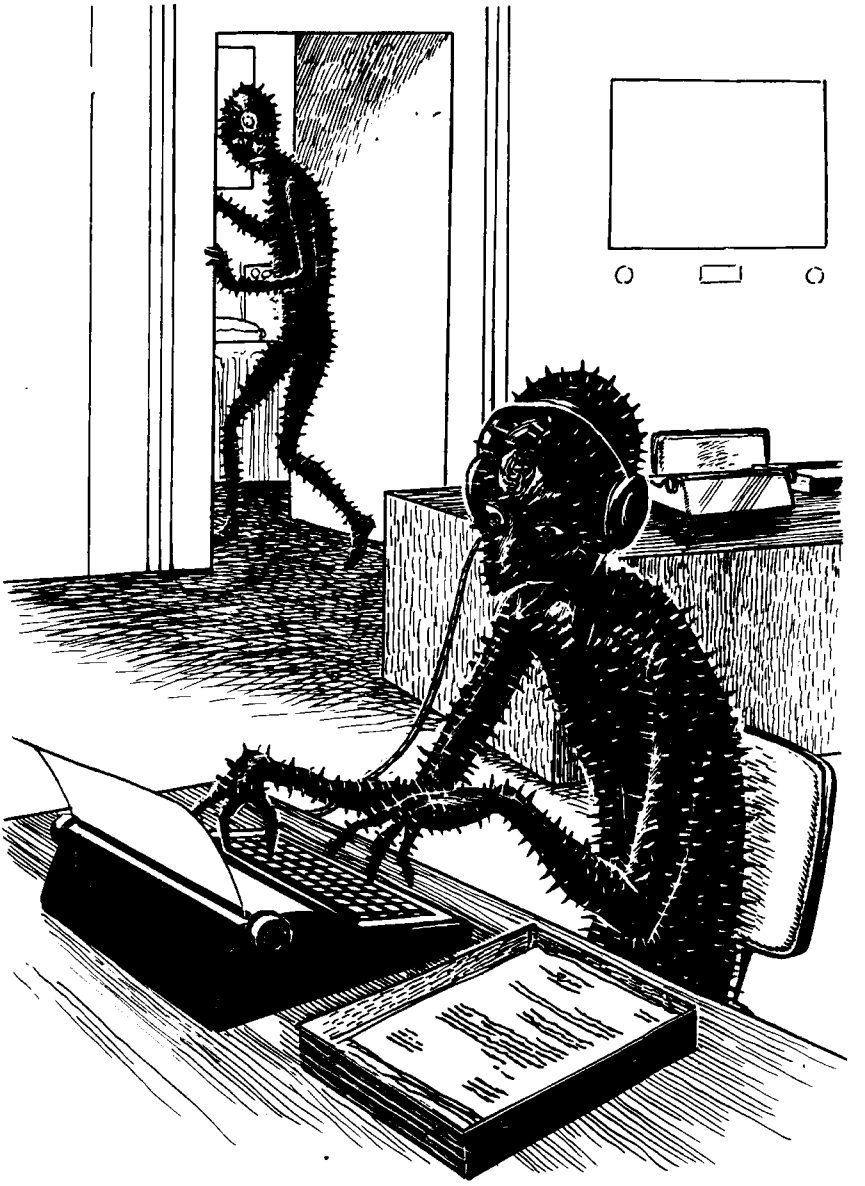

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slightly when he glanced at the biped.

"Please!" he ejaculated, making upward motions with his fat hands. Belatedly realizing what was meant, the biped got up and stood at attention beside his desk, as Emma was doing beside hers.

"Good!" cried Grück happily. "Excellent! You see, Fritz, a little politeness, and everything is better." He turned to Emma, examined the contents of her *out* basket, beaming with approval. "Fine, Emma, good work. Emma shall have three bonbons with her dinner! You hear, Rudi?"

"Very good, Herr Doktor," said the keeper, with a bow. He put three large lumps of some dry-looking, pale green substance on a plate which already contained a sort of gray-brown stew, and carried it into Emma's room. When he returned, Grück was staring at the biped's *out* basket with an expression of hurt disbelief.

"Fritz, can this be all?" asked Grück. "For a whole morning's work? Surely you can't be so lazy!"

The biped muttered, "I did the best I could."

Grück shook his head sadly. "No bonbons for Fritz today, Karl. What a shame, eh, Wenzl? Poor Fritz has earned no bonbons. We are sorry for Fritz. But to give him bonbons for such work would not be fair to Emma, who works hard! Correct, Wenzl?"

Wenzl, fixing the biped with a cold and unregretful stare, said nothing. Grück went on, "But this afternoon, if there is an improvement — well, we shall see! Until then—" He picked up the single page in the biped's basket, glanced at it again, and clucked his tongue. "Not correct! Not correct!" he said, stabbing a blunt finger against the page. "Here are mistakes, Fritz! So little work, and also so bad! And where . . . *where* are the carbon copies?"

"No one said anything to me about any carbon copies," the biped replied angrily. "As for the typewriting, I've told you, this animal's body is unfamiliar to me. Let me see you type with somebody else's fingers, and see if you do as well!" He felt a little dizzy, and went on shouting without caring much what happened. "You can take your whole damned Zoo, for all I care," he said, shaking his fist in Grück's face, "and slide down my—"

The room was tilting absurdly to the left, walls, Grück, Wenzl, keeper, Emma and all. He clutched at the desk to stop it, but the desk treacherously sprang up and struck him a dull blow across the face. He heard Grück and the keeper shouting, and Emma's voice piping in the background;

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then he lost interest and drifted away into grayness.

"LIE still," said a fretfully reassuring voice.

The biped looked up and recognized the gigantic face of Prinzmetal, the surgeon. Prinzmetal's large brown eyes were swimming over him; Prinzmetal's soft mouth was twisted nervously.

"Shock and strain," said Prinzmetal over his shoulder. The biped could make out two or three other persons standing farther back in the room. He was lying, he now realized, on the cot in the back room of his cage. He felt curiously limp and weak.

"It's all right," said Prinzmetal soothingly. "You lost consciousness a moment, that's all. It could happen to any highly-strung creature. Lie still, Fritz, rest a little." His face turned, receded.

Grück's voice asked a question. Prinzmetal replied, "Nothing — he will be as good as new tomorrow." Feet shuffled on the concrete floor. The biped heard, more dimly: "It's a good thing it isn't something organic, Herr Doktor. What do we know about the internal constitution of these beasts, after all? Nothing whatever!"

Wenzl's voice spoke briefly and dryly. "When we get a chance to dissect one—"

They were gone. The biped lay quietly, staring at the discolored ceiling. He heard the door close; then there was silence except for a faint, far-off strain of music from somewhere outside. No sound came from the inner office, or from Emma's room next door.

At length the biped got up. He relieved himself in the little bathroom, and drank some water. He realized that he was hungry.

His tray was on the folding table near the bed. The biped sat down and ate the brownish-gray stew, then picked up one of the two round lumps of dry greenish stuff which lay at the side of the tray — the "bonbons" Grück had made so much of. The biped put the thing cautiously in his mouth, then paused incredulously. The lump, which was almost as dry to the tongue as its appearance suggested, had a subtle, delicious flavor which was utterly different from anything the biped had ever tasted before. It was not sweet, not salt, not bitter, not acid. His eyes closed involuntarily as he sucked at it, causing it to grow slowly moister and dissolve in his mouth.

When it was gone he ate the other one, and then sat motionless, eyes still closed, savoring the wonder of this unexpected good thing that had happened to him. Tears welled in his eyes.

How was it possible that even in his captivity, and his despair, there should be such joy?

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THE central building of the Berlin Zoo, built in 1971 by the architect Herbert Medius, was a delightful specimen of late 20th-century architecture but had several irremediable defects. For example, the garden-roof dining room, used on formal occasions by Grück and his staff, was roofed with a soaring transparent dome into which arcs of stained glass had been let, and at certain times of the year the long, varicolored streaks of light from this dome, instead of dripping diagonally down the lemonwood and ebony walls, lay directly on the diners' tables and colored what was in their plates. The canvas curtains which were supposed to cover the dome's interior had never worked properly and were now, as usual, awaiting repair. Consequently, although Herr Doktor Grück's bauernwurst and mashed potatoes had the rich brown and white tones with which they had come from the kitchen, Prinzmetal's *boeuf au jus* was a dark ruby, as if it had been plucked raw from the bleeding carcass; Rausch's plate was deep blue; and Wenzl's was a pure, poisonous green. The visitors, of course, Umrath of *Europa-News*, Purser Bang of the Space Service and the trustee Neumann, had been placed in uncolored areas, except that a wedge of the red light that stained Prinzmetal's place occasionally glinted upon Neumann's elbow when he lifted his fork.

Wenzl, as always, sat stiff and silent at his place.

His sardonic eyes missed nothing, neither the strained reluctance with which Rausch lifted his gobbets of blue meat to his lips, nor the exaggerated motion of Prinzmetal's arm which lifted each forkful for an instant out of the sullen red light before he took it into his mouth. But Wenzl looked upon his dinner and found it green: he carved it methodically with his knife in his green hand, forked it up green and ate it green.

Umrath, the *Europa-News* man, was square and red-faced, with shrewd little eyes and pale lashes. He said, "Not a bad dinner, this. Compliment the chef, Herr Doktor. If this is how you feed the animals down there, I must say they live well."

"Feed the animals!" cried Grück merrily. "Ha, ha, my dear Umrath! No, indeed, we have our separate kitchen for that, I assure you! To feed more than five hundred different species, some of them not even Terrestrial, that is no joke, you can believe me! Take for instance the Brecht's Bipeds. Their food must be rich in sulfur and in beryllium salts. If we put that on the table here, you would soon be three sick gentlemen!"

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"Wenzl would eat it and not turn a hair," said Neumann, the aging trustee. He was quiet and dark, with a weary but business-like air about him.

"Ha! True!" cried Grück. "Our Wenzl is made of cast iron! But the bipeds, gentlemen, not so. They are delicate! They require constant care!"

"And money," put in Neumann dryly, picking with his fork at the meat on his plate, which he had hardly touched.

"It's true," said Grück soberly. "They are rarities, and they come from eighteen light-years away. One doesn't go eighteen light-years for a picnic, eh, Purser Bang?"

There was a rustling sound from the corner, which distracted the diners' attention for a moment. Heads turned. Out of the dimness scuttled something small and many-legged, with skin of a sparkling pale blue. It turned upon them the jeweled flash of its tiny red eyes, then was gone into a hole in the wainscoting. The diners looked after it without comment.

The spaceman nodded. He was tall and taciturn, lantern-jawed, and looked more like a doorkeeper than an intrepid adventurer. He cut precise cubes from the meat on his plate and chewed them thoroughly before swallowing.

"Why spend so much for bipeds, then, Grück?" Umrath demanded. "They're amusing, I suppose, in their way, but are they worth it?"

"My dear Umrath," said Grück, laying down his fork in turn, "I must tell you, the bipeds represent the dream of my life. Yes, I confess, it's true that I dream! After all, we are alive to do something in the world, to achieve something! That is why, dear Umrath, I schemed and wrote letters for five years, and why I traded two Altairan altar birds and how much money to boot I had better not mention — " he glanced at Neumann, who smiled faintly — "for our wonderful new biped Fritz. He is here, he is well, and he is a mature male. We already have our female biped Emma. No other zoo on Earth has more than one. Laugh at me if you will, but it shall be Grück, and his Berlin Zoo, who is remembered as the first man to breed bipeds in captivity!"

"Some say it can't be done," put in Umrath.

"Yes, I know it!" cried Grück gaily. "Never have bipeds been successfully bred in captivity, not even on Brecht's Planet! And why not? Because until now no one has successfully reproduced the essential conditions of their natural environment!"

"And those conditions are —?"

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asked Neumann with weary courtesy.

"That we shall discover!" said Grück. "Trust me, gentlemen, I have made already a collection of writings about Brecht's Planet and especially the bipeds. There is no larger one in the Galacticum, not even excepting the Berlin Archive!" He beamed. "And between ourselves, gentlemen, Purser Bang has a connection with a group on Brecht's Planet who are able to make physiological studies of the bipeds! Depend on it, they will give us valuable information — by way of Purser Bang, our good friend!" He reached over and patted Bang's sleeve affectionately. The spaceman half-smiled, blinked and went on eating.

"Well then, here's to the bipeds!" said Umrath, lifting his wineglass.

Grück, Prinzmetal, Rausch and Bang drank; Neumann merely raised his glass and set it down again. Wenzl, coldly upright, went on methodically cutting and eating his green meat.

"All the same," said Neumann after a moment, "it seems to me that a good deal depends on Fritz."

V

ON the morning of this eleventh day in the store, the young man climbed down as usual, very early, when the great vault was almost empty. Once or twice someone glanced at him curiously as he passed down the aisles, but he kept walking, and no one spoke to him. The clerks were busy behind the walls of glass cases, inserting new merchandise, clicking the metal doors open and shut; the cleaners in their gray-striped uniforms were pushing their whining machines along the floor. Voices echoed lonesomely under the distant ceiling.

The young man quenched his thirst at the drinking fountain between the grocery and the art gallery. Then he went into the produce section, with its mountains of fruit under glass, for his breakfast. By this time the outside doors had been opened, the music was playing, and people were beginning to stream down the aisles. The young man spent seventy pfennigs for a transparent bag of oranges and a package of bananas. Alternately eating the bananas and sucking the oranges, he wandered through the store. When he finished a piece of fruit, he tucked the peel neatly into the bag under his arm.

Once, on the evening of his second day, the young man had ventured out into the avenue again, but the crowds, the noise and the lights had disturbed him and he had gone back into the store almost immediately, afraid

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he would be outside when it closed its doors. To be inside was much better. Here there was also noise, but it was of a different quality, not so alarming. The light was even and cool, and did not hurt his eyes. And besides, in the store he found all he needed — food, drink, entertainment. Sometimes he became lost, the store was so large. But he could always find his way again by following the moving rocket-trails of light on the ceiling.

Whenever he saw one of the blue-uniformed men, he looked straight ahead until he was past. He had learned that the men in blue would not pursue him unless he climbed the grille or took something from a case without paying, and now he always made sure to pay. As for the grille, he climbed it every night, not being able to find any other way up. Twice more he had been noticed, and the men in blue had run and shouted, ringing their bells; but no one could climb after him. So he was not really very afraid of the blue-uniformed men. But he did not like to be near them, all the same.

There were still some discomforts in his new body that constantly worried him and occasionally even alarmed him by their intensity. There was something his mouth and throat wanted to do, for example. He kept trying different kinds of food and drink, and the feeling always went away, but it came back afterward. Dark, curly hair was sprouting all over his cheeks and chin, and it made his face itch. Nevertheless, he was getting along much better than he had at first. He had found out that taking his clothes and shoes off at night made them easier to bear the next day. When his underclothes had become dirty yesterday, he had bought new ones out of a machine, and he discovered now that the smooth, clean fabric was unexpectedly pleasant against his bald skin.

Without watching where his feet were leading him, he had wandered into the women's clothing section. In the middle of the central open space, a crowd had gathered around a platform. The young man went nearer. On the platform a perspiring dark-skinned man was energetically looping a wide ribbon of violet cloth around a blonde young woman who stood passively, arms raised, and stared out into space.

Both man and woman had the bright, unreal colors and the curious black outlines of the cinema he had seen on his first day, and he realized that this was another illusion. The man and woman were not really there.

The cloth took shape, became a dress. The dark-skinned man

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ran a piece of metal up the woman's side, pinching out the cloth into a ridge and tightening the dress to her body. Then he did the same thing to the other side, touched the dress swiftly here and there, cut a slit halfway down the back and began to work the finished dress up over the woman's head. Underneath, her body was shapely and cream-skinned in two brief garments of dark blue lace. Looking at her made the young man feel peculiar, and one of his discomforts suddenly became much more acute.

THE young man did not like it. As he turned to work his way out of the crowd, he came face to face with a dark-haired, pale-skinned young woman who first looked startled, then smiled happily. "Martin!" she said, taking his arm.

The young man moved away nervously. "I don't know you, madam," he said.

"What?" The woman's face changed. The young man kept on moving away. She took a step after him. "Martin Naumchik—"

Thoroughly alarmed, the young man turned and dived into the nearest hole in the crowd. He worked his way around the platform, turning his head frequently to see if he was being followed. Above him, the dark-skinned man was turning the dress inside out. When he finished, he poised it over the young woman's shoulders, then began to work it down over her body. Both seemed to revolve as he circled them. No matter how far around he got, he could never see their backs.

The young man left the crowd cautiously on the opposite side, and looked around. The dark-

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haired woman was not in sight. Nevertheless, he took a complicated route out of that part of the store, glancing back many times.

Crossing the elevator plaza, he saw people looking at him, and realized he had been shaking his head unconsciously as he walked. The encounter with the dark-haired woman had taken him completely by surprise. It had somehow never occurred to him before that as a human being he now had not only a name and clothing, personal possessions and so on, but also friends and acquaintances. The idea frightened the young man. What could he possibly say to these people? What would they expect of him?

The comfort and safety of his refuge in the store began to seem illusory. For a moment he thought wistfully of his clean, bare little cubicle in the Hamburg Zoo. But the memory was already so faded and distant that it could not occupy his attention long. The reality was this gigantic, glittering room with its unending murmur of voices, its exciting smells, its clicking elevators, its rocket-trails of red, green, amber, blue that traveled in pulses across the ceiling.

The best thing might be to go away, change his name perhaps, find a place to live in some other city where he was not known. But he had no confidence that he could manage such a trip properly. Were there stores such as this in other cities than Berlin? He was humiliated to realize that he did not know. He had lived in Hamburg for twelve years, but had no idea what lay beyond the Zoo grounds. Other cities were only names to him.

AN hour later, up in the third-floor lunchroom, he was still thinking about it over buns and coffee. It was his first experiment with coffee. The flavor was unexpected and rather unpleasant, but he liked its sweetness and warmth.

It was odd how differently he felt about foods now that he was a human being. He had been going cautiously, since his bad experience of the first night in the restaurant. He had eaten only fruits and bread, and sometimes a sausage on a roll. But in time he expected to do all things human beings did, even to eating the wet brown messes he saw on his neighbors' plates.

He picked up his cup, experimentally flexed the muscles of his lips and drank. He was proud of this accomplishment, which had cost him much effort.

The last few drops rattled noisily as they went in, and one or two people nearby glanced at him with raised eyebrows. Evi-

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dently this was not a sound that one made. He set down the cup in some embarrassment, and consulted his wristwatch: it was just eleven.

He restrained himself from checking the time by his other wristwatch, which was in his pocket. He had observed that human beings did not wear two at once, perhaps because the watches were so accurate that no checking was required.

A pattern of bright lights flashed for an instant on his section of the counter. He glanced upward automatically, as he had done the time before, and the time before that, and saw only a fading starflower of red sparks in the machine overhead. They dimmed and went out. A moment later they flashed on again, making him blink and jerk his head back. The bright chrome and glass ring of the revolving display case slowed, stopped. Directly in front of him, a square black hole appeared, and a transparency lighted up. The young man read, "EMPTY PLATES, PLEASE." He pushed his empty cup and saucer, and the plate with the remnants of his buns, obediently into the hole, which closed on it with a metallic snap. The transparency blinked, shimmered, and lighted up again: "THANK YOU."

With a warm feeling for the polite machine, the young man stood up and left the lunchroom. As he passed the entrance, where a crowd was waiting to get in, he found himself once more face to face with the same dark-haired young woman.

She stared at him, apparently as shocked as he was. Neither moved for an instant. Then the young woman, without a word, raised her hand and slapped him in the face.

The blow was so unexpected and painful that the young man was unable to move for a few moments longer, while the young woman turned and walked away. People standing around were staring at him; some where whispering to each other.

No one had ever struck him before. With one hand to the curious numbness that was the pain in his cheek, the young man turned away.

He spent the rest of the day wandering the store half-blindly, shivering a little. His pleasure in the bright colors and varied shapes around him was dimmed almost to extinction. He was waiting for it to be time for him to climb to his hideaway in the tower. Beyond that he did not think.

EVENTUALLY it was eighteen-thirty. The crowds were beginning to flow toward the

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exits. The young man moved across the elevator plaza, vaguely aware that the crowds were heavier and somehow more anxious than usual tonight. He passed a man with a camera, then another. Two in a row. He had sometimes amused himself by counting men with cameras, or fat woman, or crying children, but now he had no interest in games. There were a lot of uniforms in sight, too: not only the blue store police, but white uniforms, red ones, gold-and-white ones . . .

He passed two blue-uniformed men who were standing together, looking intently around them. One stepped forward, glancing at the young man, then at something he held in his hand. "One moment, sir."

The young man sidestepped, anxious not to be touched again.

"Stop!" cried the store policeman, reaching.

The young man whirled and ran for the grille. Bells were ringing on all sides; footsteps pounding after him. He sprang, caught the grille, began to climb.

Halfway up, he glanced back. No one was climbing after him, but there was a great deal of activity at the base of the grille. Blue-uniformed men were clustered around a bundle of something gray, unrolling it. There were others, in gleaming white uniforms, with feathers on their hats: but these were not doing anything, only standing with feet apart, staring up at him.

He went on climbing. As he neared the top of the grille, two heads appeared over the edge, then a third.

The young man paused. The three men wore blue uniform caps — they were store police, not merely the clerks who lived in this upper level. While he was wondering what to do, the three heads ducked out of sight, then reappeared. The shoulders and arms of the three men came into view. Something cloudy and gray seemed to float down toward him.

The young man ducked, but it was too late. The cloudy thing settled around him with a solid thump, and he discovered that it was a net of grayish cord. It pulled tight around him when he attempted to swing away to the side. There were ropes attached to the net, and the men above were holding them.

Panicked, the young man tried to climb down. The ropes held him back, then slackened a little; but when he paused to try to remove the net with one hand, they tightened again.

Down below, two men in gray-striped uniforms were pushing up a sort of tall ladder on wheels. The plaza was full of motionless people now, and the men in white were keeping them back.

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The ladder was in position almost directly under him, and now a white-uniformed man began to climb it.

The young man saw that in another moment all his chances would be gone. Taking a deep breath, he swung himself violently away from the grille, tearing with both hands at the net that held him.

The great room revolved massively around him. His back struck the grille hard, knocking the breath out of him. He kicked himself away again, still tearing wildly at the meshes of the net. The man on the ladder was very near. The net gave a little; he had found an edge. His head was out, then his shoulders.

The grille struck him again. The man on the ladder leaned out and reached for him. Then he was falling.

VI

SPRAWLED on the couch in his room, the biped read:

"The bipeds of the Great Northern Plateau, although the most interesting life-form on Brecht's Planet, are a vanishing species. Their once numerous herds are no longer seen in the vicinity of the Earth settlements. Only scattered groups of three to five are occasionally met in the mountains and foothills to the north. These animals, prior to the development of Brecht's Planet by man, possessed a complex herd organization and communicated by vocal signals. Their mating ceremonies, held in the spring of the year, are said to have involved barbaric cruelties to the females."

He closed the book thoughtfully. That might account partly for Emma's attitude, he supposed —if she had witnessed something of the kind before being captured and brought to Earth as an infant. However —

He thumbed the book open at a different place. "The knob or crest," he read, "appearing only as a vestige in the male, is a conspicuous purplish-red ovoid in the female. The function of the crest is unknown, but it is thought to be a secondary sexual characteristic. Erhardt (6) has suggested that it functions as an organ of display in the animals' natural state, but Zimmer (7) has pronounced it to be merely a hypertrophied pineal eye. The organ is vulnerable, as attested by the large number of older females who have lost it through accident or in conflict with other bipeds."

The biped closed the book again and tossed it irritably onto the floor. He was reading *Brecht's Planet: Riddle of the Universe* for the second time, out of sheer boredom, since it was the only

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book he had in the back room: but the parts that were full of footnote references reminded him too much of the work he copied every day for Grück and the other staff members.

In another two hours or so it would be closing time, and he could go into the living room without exposing himself to all those meaty red faces. This time he would remember to bring some reading matter into the back room, enough to last him a few days.

Actually, there was nothing to stop him from going out there now . . . there were some magazines in the rack, he remembered, with bright covers. He could scoop them up and come straight back in. But he hesitated to make the move.

It was extraordinary how hateful a row of human faces could be, staring in at you over an iron railing, with their great fat jaws moving as they chewed.

He stood up restlessly. Hell and damnation! There was nothing to do here except read *Brecht's Planet* again, and nothing to do in the office. His work was all cleaned up, and there was no point in trying to smuggle out another letter until he found out what had happened to the first one.

Anxiety seized him again, and he began pacing back and forth. Surely nothing could have gone wrong?

When the first batch of signed correspondence had come down from "upstairs" to be folded and sealed in envelopes, the biped had simply added his to the pile. Rudi, the pimply young keeper, had carried them out on his next trip. There was no reason to suppose that stamped, sealed letters were inspected by Grück or anyone. The keeper probably took them directly to the post box.

But he had been waiting for a week. If Stein had received the letter, why hadn't something happened before now?

FROM Emma's living room next door he heard a faint creak, a pause, another creak. Probably she had got up from her chair for something, then sat down again . . . all in full view of the crowd, naturally.

That decided him. He looked at the open doorway, then stiffened himself and walked through it, looking straight ahead.

The first moment was even worse than he had expected. The room was enormous and empty; the window was crowded with faces. He tried to shut them out of his awareness, looking only at the magazines, which now seemed much less attractive than he had remembered them. After a moment it began to be easier to go

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on than to turn back, but his mouth was still dry and his heart thumped painfully. Outside, there was a steady movement along the railing as people who had been staring at Emma came over to stare at him.

Walking stiffly, the biped reached the relaxing chair and leaned past it to get the magazines. Be natural, he ordered himself. Pick up the magazines, turn . . .

Outside the wall of glass, people were waving to attract his attention. There were cries of "Ah, just look!" and "Fritz, hello!" A blond child, carried on his father's shoulder so as to see better, turned suddenly beet-red and began to cry. Several people were aiming cameras. Through the uproar, just as he turned away, the biped thought he heard his name called.

He turned incredulously.

In the front line of the crowd, wedged in between two fat matrons, was a medium-sized man in a gray surcoat with a wad of paper in his hand. His eyes, friendly and inquisitive, were looking straight into the biped's. His mouth moved, and once more the biped thought he heard his name spoken, but the noise was so great that he could not be sure.

The man in gray smiled slightly, raised his wad of paper, then wrote something on it with careful, firm motions. He held the paper up. On it was lettered, "ARE YOU NAUMCHIK?"

The biped felt a rush of joy and gratitude that almost choked him. He fell against the glass, nodding vehemently and pointing to himself. "I am Naumchik!" he shouted.

The man in gray nodded reassuringly, folded up his paper and tucked it away. With a wave of his hand, he turned and began to struggle out of the crowd.

"Fritz! Fritz!" yelled all the red faces.

THE BIPED waited, pacing up and down, for twenty minutes by the big office clock, and still nothing happened. He knew he should control his impatience, that the gray man might be upstairs at this moment, arguing for his release; but it was no use, he had to do something or burst.

He eyed the telephone. He had been forbidden to use it except for routine calls in connection with his work. But to the devil with that! The biped strode to the phone, swung out the listening unit. The call light began to pulse. After a moment the voice of the switchboard girl spoke faintly from the instrument: "Please?"

"This is Martin Naumchik," said the biped, feeling as he

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spoke that the words sounded subtly false. "I want to speak to Dr. Grück. Please connect me with him."

"Who did you say you are?"

"Martin —" the biped began, and swallowed. "All right then, never mind, this is Fritz the biped. I want to speak—"

"Why didn't you say so in the first place? Is there anything wrong with the work?"

"No, the work is finished. It's something quite urgent, so if you will kindly—"

"Is anything wrong in the cage?"

"No, but I must speak to Grück. Look here, whatever your name is, kindly don't argue and just let me speak to—"

"My name is Fraülein Müller," her voice broke in coldly, "and I have instructions not to let the animals make personal telephone calls. So if there is no emergency, and nothing wrong with your work—"

"I tell you it's urgent!" howled the biped. With mounting fury, he went on shouting into the mouthpiece. "You idiotic woman, if you prevent me from speaking to Grück, there will be an accounting, I promise you! Make that connection at once, or — Hello? Do you hear me? Hello, Fraülein Müller, hello?"

The empty hum of the line answered him.

With shaking fingers, the biped closed the instrument and then yanked it open again. The call light pulsed, and went on pulsing.

The female's greenish, wide-jawed head was visible beyond her doorframe as the biped turned. "Well, what are you staring at?" he shouted. The head vanished.

The biped sat down abruptly in his desk chair, kneading his three-fingered hands nervously together. It was intolerable to be shut up like this now, just when his freedom was perhaps so near. If something was about to happen, the least they could do was to let him know, not leave him in the dark like this. After all, whose life was at stake? But that was always the way with these inflated bureaucrats, they couldn't see past their own fat noses. Let the lower ranks wait and worry for nothing. What did they care?

Oh, but just let him get out, and then! What an expose he would write! What a series! *Shocking Inhumanity of Zoo Keepers!* His nervousness, which had abated a little, increased again and he sprang to his feet. Let him once get out, that was all — just let him get out! The rest would not matter so much, even if he were condemned . . .

He paused to listen. Yes, there came the sound again. The door was opening.

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THE biped ran to the passage; but it was not Grück or the man in gray, only Rudi with his little cart.

"Oh, you," said the biped, turning away dully.

"Yes, me," Rudi answered with spirit. "Who else should it be, I'd like to know? Who does all the hard work around here, and gets no thanks for it?" He pushed his cart into the office space, grumbling all the time, without looking at the biped. "Does Herr Doktor Grück feed the rhino, or the thunderbirds? Who pokes the meat down the boa constrictor's throat with a broomstick, Wenzl? Does Rausch swamp out the monkeys' cages, or is it me? You bipeds are not so bad, at least you clean up after yourselves, but some of these beasts, you wouldn't believe how filthy they are! They throw things on the floor, they let themselves go just where they feel like it . . . Well, that's life. Some live on the fat of the land, and others have to work up to their elbows in monkey dirt." With a scowl, he took a small object off his cart and threw it onto the nearest desk. "There's some soap for you. You're to clean yourself up and be interviewed, and the order is to hurry. So don't be late, mind, or I'll get the blame, not you."

The biped's heart began pounding violently. "Did you say interviewed?" he stammered. "Who—what?"

"Interviewed, is all I know. Some newspaperman wants to write a story about you. All lies, I dare say, but that's his lookout." Rudi was wheeling his cart around, still without glancing at the biped.

There was a sound behind them, and the biped turned in time to see Emma come darting nervously out of her doorway.

"Rudi," she piped. "Oh, Rudi—please wait!"

But the keeper had disappeared into the passage, and either did not hear or did not choose to turn back. After a moment came the sound of the outer door closing.

Emma retreated toward her room as the biped turned, her hands going to her head in the familiar gesture. But she paused when she saw him reach for the small packet on the desk.

"Is that soap?" she asked timidly. "I heard him say it was."

The biped picked up the small paper-wrapped oblong. It had a faint aromatic scent which was oddly disturbing. "Soap, yes," he said abstractedly. "I've got to get cleaned up so that I can be interviewed."

"I had some once," the female said, edging nearer. "It was a long time ago. They said it was bad for me."

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"I suppose so," the biped muttered, tearing at the paper with his blunt fingers. The paper ripped open, the soap shot out between his hands and clattered across the floor almost to Emma's feet. She bent slowly and picked it up. The fragrance had grown almost overpoweringly strong.

"Give it to me, will you?" the biped asked impatiently, walking nearer. He was at the scuffed chalk line that divided his side of the room from hers, but she took no notice. With the soap clutched in both hands, she was intently sniffing. Her mouth was half open, her eyes turned up.

The biped took a step across the line. Still she did not respond.

Alarmed, the biped halted and stared at her. "Emma!" he said.

Her head turned. "Yes?" she said in a dreamy voice.

"What's the matter with you, Emma?"

"Nothing matter," she replied, with a vacuous grin.

"Well then, give me the soap if you please"

"Good soap," she said, nodding, but she did not move to hand it over, and seemed almost unaware that she was still holding it close to her face.

ON the point of crossing the line to take it from her, the biped hesitated. It suddenly struck him as rather odd that Rudi should have given him soap to wash with at all. He had not seen any in his week's incarceration, and had not really missed it. Was soap good for this body, with its feathery spines? But if not, then why—?

Shaking his head irritably, he moved backward, away from the fascinating smell that came from the thing Emma was holding. With that insistent odor in his nostrils it was hard to think connectedly.

He concentrated. At last: "Why did they say soap was bad for you, Emma?" he demanded.

"Bad for me," she agreed, swaying as if to inaudible music. "Soap bad for Emma. No more soap, too bad. Beautiful soap."

As the biped stared at her silently, he heard the door opening again. His dulled brain began to work quickly once more. "Emma, listen to me," he whispered. "Take your soap and go into your own room. Understand? Go into your own room. Don't come out till I tell you!"

"Emma not come out." With exasperating slowness, she moved toward the door as Rudi came back in, this time without his cart.

"Ready, are you?" he asked, with a glance at Emma's disappearing figure.

The biped turned to face him, trying to look as dreamy and dis-

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tant as Emma had. "All ready," he said slowly.

"Know who you are, do you?"

"My name is Naum—"

"No, no," Rudi interrupted, "don't be stupid, your name is Fritz. Now say it after me. 'My name is Fritz.' "

"Name is Fritz," said the biped agreeably. He kept his eyes rolled up, and swayed on his feet. His head was buzzing with angry surmise, but he kept his voice blurred and slow.

"That's all right, then," Rudi said, satisfied. "How much is two and two, Fritz?"

The biped pretended to consider the question at length. "Four?" he asked hesitantly.

"Good fellow. Now how much is four and four and four and four?"

The biped blinked slowly. "Four and four," he said.

Rudi smiled. "All right then, come along. You're going upstairs to meet some nice gentlemen, Fritz, and if you behave yourself — mind, I said if! — I'll give you something tasty all for yourself." He took the biped's arm.

THEY rode up in the elevator, walked along the glass-walled corridor overlooking the Zoo grounds. It was a sunny late afternoon, and the gravel paths were full of strolling people. A few faces tilted to watch them, but there was not much excitement. They entered the main building, Rudi opened a door, and the biped found himself being ushered into the same oak-paneled office where he had been received on the first day. Beside the desk, Grück, Wenzl and the man in the gray surcoat were waiting.

"Ha!" said Grück jovially, "here is our Fritz at last. Now we shall see, my dear Tassen, how much truth there is in this fantastic story. We could have begun sooner, but our Fritz sometimes dirties himself, not so, Wenzl? Too bad, but what can one expect? So!" He rubbed his hands together. "Fritz, you are well?"

"Very well, Herr Doktor," said the biped.

"Excellent! And you have eaten a good supper, Fritz?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor."

Grück frowned slightly, glancing at Rudi, but in a moment collected himself and addressed the biped again: "Very good, Fritz. Now then, this gentleman is Herr Tassen of the Freie Presse. He will ask you some questions, and you will answer correctly. Understood? Then begin, Herr Tassen!"

The man in the gray surcoat looked at the biped with a faintly uncertain expression. "Well then, Fritz —" he began.

The biped took a step forward, away from Rudi, and said quick-

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ly, "How long have you worked for the *Freie Presse?*"

Tassen's eyebrows went up. "A little over a year, why?"

"Do you know Zellini, the rewrite man?"

"How is this?" cried Grück, coming forward, red-faced with astonishment and anger. "Fritz, your manners! Remember—"

"Yes, I know Zellini," said the newsman. He was scribbling rapidly on his wad of paper.

"A little dark man, nearly bald. I sat next to him at the last European Journalists' Dinner. He—"

"Wenzl!" shouted Grück. The biped felt himself seized by Rudi from behind, while Wenzl, his face a white mask, came toward him around the desk.

"They are holding me against my will!" shouted the biped, struggling. "My name is Martin Naumchik! They tried to drug me before they brought me up here!"

Grück and Tassen were shouting. Wenzl had seized the biped's arm in one hand and was gripping his muzzle in the other, holding it closed. Between them, he and Rudi raised the biped off his feet and began carrying him out the door.

"Outrageous!" Grück was trumpeting. "A trick!"

The newsman, almost as red-faced as he, was shouting, "Bring him back at once!"

The door swung closed, cutting off the din. Without bothering to set him on his feet, Wenzl and Rudi carried the now unresisting biped down the corridor toward the elevator.

EMMA, it appeared, had not only been sniffing the soap all the time the biped had been gone but had eaten some as well. She was taken to the infirmary, unconscious, and remained there two days.

Deliveries of work stopped. Rudi, the keeper, disappeared and his place was taken by a heavy slow man named Otto. No one else visited the cage.

Exhausted and triumphant, the biped spent most of his time in the front room of the cage, sometimes reading or watching television, sometimes merely watching the crowds, to which he had slowly become accustomed. He hoped to see Tassen again, but the man did not reappear. On the day after the interview, however, a man outside took a folded newspaper from his surcoat and spread it out for the biped to see.

He was just able to read the headline, REALLY HUMAN, ZOO BIPED CLAIMS. Then a guard snatched the newspaper away and led the man off, lecturing him severely.

The biped would have given a day's meals for that newspaper:

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but now at least he knew that Tassen had written the story and the city editor had printed it.

Now he could wait. Once the truth was out, they would never be able to hush it up again, whatever they did. The biped schooled himself to patience. For a while he had toyed with the idea of lettering some messages on large pieces of cardboard and holding them up to the crowd. But he was afraid that if he did so he would be taken out of the front room, and then he could not watch for Tassen.

On the third day, Emma was brought in after breakfast, looking feeble and wild-eyed, her spines draggled. She gave the biped a look as she passed which he could not interpret — wistfulness, a reproach, an appeal of some kind?

He found himself worrying about it and wanting to talk to her, but she did not emerge from her rooms.

A little later, the outer door opened again and Otto came in. He stood in the doorway and growled, "Wanted upstairs. An interview. Come."

The biped got to his feet, feeling his heart begin to pound. He asked wryly, "No soap this time?" But the keeper stared at him in brute incomprehension.

This time, instead of going to Grück's office they passed it and entered a smaller room on the opposite side ofthe corridor. The room was empty except for a table and two chairs.

Otto held the door without comment, waited until the biped was inside, then went out again, closing the door.

The biped looked around nervously, but there was nothing to see: only the three pieces of furniture, the scuffed black tiles of the floor and the mud-brown walls, which were dirty and in need of paint.

After a long time, the door opened again and a large, olive-skinned man in a red surcoat appeared. Behind him the biped glimpsed the leviathan bulk of Grück, and heard his rich, fluting voice.

"Of course, my dear Herr Opatescu, of course! We have always desired —"

"Don't think I am taken in by these games," said the visitor furiously, pausing in the doorway. "If I had not threatened to go to the Council—"

"You are mistaken, Herr Opatescu, I assure you! We only wished—"

"I know what you wished," said Opatescu with heavy sarcasm. "Go on, I've had enough of it."

GRUCK retired, looking chastened, and the visitor closed the door. He was carrying a pig-

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skin briefcase, which he put down carefully on the table. Then, with a toothy smile, he advanced on the biped and shook his hand cordially.

"We newsmen have to stick together when it comes to dealing with swine like that," he said. "Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Opatescu. You have no idea the tricks they played to keep me out — but here I am! Now then, Herr Naumchik . . . one moment." He busied himself with the briefcase, from which he produced a flat, clear crystic solid-state recorder and a microphone. "Here we are. Sit down, please — so." He pushed the microphone toward the biped, adjusted the controls of the instrument and switched it on. The indicator began to crawl over the surface of the record block.

Opatescu sat down opposite the biped, leaning forward on his arms, without bothering to remove his bulky surcoat. "This recording is being made in the Berlin Zoo, June seventeenth, 2002. Present are Martin Naumchik, otherwise known as the biped Fritz, and the reporter Opatescu."

He settled himself more comfortably and began again. "Now, Herr Naumchik — for I believe that you are in reality Martin Naumchik — I want you to tell me, if you will, in your own words just how your amazing experience took place. Begin then, if you please."

The biped did as he was asked willingly enough, although Opatescu was a type he did not like — glib, assertive, the sort of reporter you expected to find working on Central European scandal sheets. But since the man was on his side, and anyhow a recording was being made —

Opatescu listened rather restlessly but without interruption until the biped had brought his story up to date. Then, with a thoroughness which made the biped wonder if his first estimate had not been mistaken, Opatescu took him over the story all over again, asking questions, eliciting more details, getting him to repeat certain points several times in different words. When he was satisfied with this, he began questioning the biped about his past life, and particularly about sources of evidence that he was actually Naumchik. They went over this ground with equal thoroughness. When Opatescu finally turned off the recorder and began to pack it away, the biped watched him with grudging respect.

"I must tell you I'm grateful to you for all this," he said. "I suppose you're a friend of Tassen's, the man who broke the story?"

"Tassen, yes, I know Tassen,"

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said Opatescu, busily fastening his briefcase. "He's written some follow-up yarns, good stuff, you'll see when you get out."

The biped moistened his stiff lips. "I don't suppose you have any idea—"

"When that will be? Not long. You're going to have a press conference, a big one this time — newspapers, sollies, TV. They can't hold you after that. The public wouldn't stand for it. Well, Naumchik, it's been a pleasure." He held out his meaty hand.

"For me, too, Herr Opatescu. By the way, what paper did you say you were from?"

"*Pravda*." Opatescu glanced at his watch, then swung his briefcase off the table and turned to go.

"Do you happen to know Kyrill Reshevsky, the—"

"Yes, yes, but let's reminisce some other time, shall we?" He smiled, showing large gleaming teeth. "I've got a deadline. You understand. Goodbye, Herr Naumchik—patience." Still smiling, he backed out and closed the door.

The keeper Otto appeared almost at once to take the biped back. Though usually laconic, he spoke up on the way down to the cages. "So now they are going to let you out, are they?"

"So it seems," said the biped happily.

"Well, well," said Otto, shaking his head. "What next?"

FOR the next two days the biped could not read or sit still for more than a few minutes at a time. He kept the television turned on, and watched every hourly news broadcast. Once, early on the first day, a commentator mentioned his story, and a brief glimpse of him on film — evidently taken on the day of his arrival at the Zoo — was flashed on the screen. After that, there was nothing.

In between news broadcasts, he spent most of his time pacing up and down the office space, imprisoning poor Emma, who no sooner put her head out of her room than the biped, by some gesture or exclamation, frightened her back in again. He gave the switchboard girl no rest, ringing her up all day long and demanding to speak to Grück, to Prinzmetal, to anyone. On the afternoon of the second day the phone went dead. The line had been disconnected.

Shortly afterward, Otto entered. He had a bundle of newspapers and magazines on his cart.

"They send you these," he said, dumping the bundle onto a vacant desk. "Read, and don't bother Fraülein Müller." He turned and left.

The biped forgot him at once.

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He snatched up the topmost paper — it was the Frankfurter *Morgenblatt*—and leafed through it with trembling fingers until he found a column headed, "STRANGE STATEMENTS OF ZOO BIPED."

He read the story avidly, although it was evidently nothing more than a rehash of his interview with Tassen. Then, curbing his impatience, he began sorting out the papers in the stack by date and piling them on the floor. When he got to the bottom of the stack, to his delight, he found a scrapbook and a pair of shears.

Squatting on the floor — his old legs had never been so limber — he began carefully cutting out the stories about himself and pressing them onto the adhesive pages of the scrapbook. The culled papers he put aside for later reading.

As he worked, he discovered that the biped stories fell into three classes. First, straight and rather unimaginative reporting, like that of the Frankfurter *Morgenblatt;* second, sympathetic pieces, appearing usually in the Sunday feature sections and with feminine by-lines (an item headlined TRAPPED IN AN ANIMAL'S BODY!, by Carla Ernsting, was typical of these); and finally, a trickle of heavily slanted stories and editorials, turning up in the later issues and in the newsmagazines. These he read with surprise and a growing fear. "Neurotic pseudohumanitarians," said *Heute* in a boxed editorial, "seek to degrade humanity to the level of animals, and in so doing, strike at the very root of our civilization. Make no mistake: these sick minds would have us recognize as human every slimy polyp, every acid-breathing toad that can parrot a few phrases in German or walk through a simple maze. The self-styled Martin Naumchik, an upstart member of a vicious, degraded species . . ."

The biped crumpled the paper in a burst of anger. Rising, he circled the piles of newspaper, glaring at them. Then he squatted again, smoothed out the offending page and read the editorial to the end.

But he was too agitated to go on working. He closed the scrapbook and went into his front room to stare out at the gray autumn day. The sky had turned cold and rainy, and few people were on the paths.

He could no longer ignore the fact that people did not *want* to believe a biped's body could be inhabited by a human mind and soul. In a general way he could even sympathize with it. But surely they must see that this was a special, different case!

He pressed his muzzle against the cold glass, down which scat-

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tered raindrops were slowly creeping.

But what if they would not?

He tried to imagine himself set free, recognized as Martin Naumchik, his rights as a citizen restored . . . What then? A grotesque vision of himself, a naked biped, in the city room of *Paris-Soir,* talking to Ehrichs . . . then himself at a party, among fully dressed men and women with glasses in their hands.

It was absurd, impossible. Where could he go? Who would accept him? Where could he get work, or even lodgings?

The biped set his jaw stubbornly, gripping his three-fingered hands together. "I am Martin Naumchik!" he muttered. But even in his own ears, the words sounded false.

VII

The biped woke himself up, tossing and muttering, from a peculiarly unpleasant dream. Something had happened to his body, his face had gone all soft and squashy, his limbs stiff . . . The horror of it was that everyone around him seemed to take this as entirely normal, and he could not tell then what was wrong.

He came fully awake and sat up in bed, clanking his jaws and rumpling the feathery spines along his side with his fingers. He had been dreaming, he realized suddenly — dreaming of himself as he had been before the change.

He sat for a moment, dully thinking about it. He felt a dim sense of betrayal, as if he had somehow foresworn his loyalty to that human body, once so familiar, which now seemed like an improbable nightmare. It disturbed him a little that his feelings could change so radically, in a matter of weeks. If that could happen, where was there a bottom to anything?

He got out of bed, feeling his good spirits return with the healthy responses of his body. After all, there was no use looking backward. He was himself, as determined as ever, and — he stiffened with realization . . . how could he have forgotten? — this was the morning of his final accounting with Grück.

Yawning nervously, he went into the living room and switched on the wall television. It was not time for the news yet. He glanced out the window, past the temporary fence, a dozen yards away, that the workmen had put up yesterday. The lawns and paths were empty in the early sunlight; there was a flutter of wings in one of the distant aviaries, then stillness again.

Now that the time was so near, he was beginning to feel anxious. He had half expected Grück to

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try to drug him once more, and had slept every night with a barricade across the doorway; but except for the fence, which kept anyone from coming near the cage, nothing had been done to interfere with him. He dragged the table and bookcase out of the way and wandered into the office space.

As he crossed the room, Emma's face appeared in her doorway. "Good morning," she said timidly.

He turned on the television. It was not time for the news yet.

As he entered the office area, Emma's face appeared in her doorway. "Good morning," she said timidly.

"Good morning, Emma," the biped answered, mildly surprised. His attention was not on her. He was thinking about the press-conference to come.

The female ventured a step or two out of the doorway. "Today is Wednesday," she observed.

"That's right, Wednesday."

"This is the day you are going to prove you are Herr Naumchik."

"Yes," the biped said, surprised and pleased.

"Then you will be going away."

"I suppose I will, yes." What was the creature getting at?

"I shall be all alone," Emma said.

"Well," said the biped awk-

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wardly, "I expect you'll get used to it."

"I shall miss you," Emma said. "Good-by, Fritz."

"Good-by."

She turned and went back into her room. The biped stared after her, touched and vaguely disturbed.

From the living room sounded a chime, then a hearty voice, "Eight hundred hours, time for the news! Good morning, this is Reporter Walter Szaborni, at your service. Seven hundred are known dead in a Calcutta earthquake! Two members of the Council of Bavaria have been accused of improper conduct! These and other stories—"

Hurrying into the living room, the biped picked up the control box that lay beside the chair and pressed the channel selector. In the wall screen, the ruddy-faced announcer vanished and was replaced by a beaming elderly lady, eccentrically dressed, who sat at the keyboard of a piano. "For my first selection this morning," she announced in a heavy Slavic accent, "I shall play Morgenstern's 'Dawn' . . ." *Click!* She gave way to a muscular young man in a cream-colored leotard, who sat on the floor rotating himself on one buttock. "Just ea-sily back," he said, "and then forward —" *Click!*

". . . We bring you the latest development in a case that has all Berlin talking," said an invisible voice.

THE biped caught his breath: the screen showed a view of the Zoo grounds, moving at a walking pace toward the main building. With a curious shock, turning and looking out the window, past the incurious faces of a few people who stood at the railing, the biped realized what he was about to see. Out there in the early sunshine, walking slowly across the lawn, was a man with a tiny television camera.

". . . who claims to be Martin Naumchik, a reporter for *Paris-Soir,*" the voice was saying. At the same moment, the outer door rattled. The biped vacillated a moment, then left the screen and hurried into the office space. It was the keeper with his cart.

"Otto! Have you any message for me?"

"No message. Eat," said Otto, unloading trays from his cart.

"But, is the press conference really going to be held? Is anyone here yet?"

"Plenty of people," Otto grunted. "All in good time. Eat." He walked away.

But eating was out of the question; the biped pushed the food around with his fork, took a bite or two, then gave it up and

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walked restlessly back and forth in his inner room until, after what seemed hours, the door opened and Otto returned.

As he ran into the office space, the biped caught sight of Emma peering out of her doorway again. Ignoring her, he demanded, "Are they ready for me now?"

"Yes. Come," Otto said. The biped smoothed down his spines and followed.

There were crowds outside the gallery, and in the corridors as well; the biped glimpsed Prinzmetal going by with a harried expression. Outside the penthouse dining room, there were men wearing earphones, crouching over metal boxes covered with switches and dials. A white-uniformed Berlin policeman stood guard by the entrance. Ignoring him, Otto opened the door and leaned in for a moment, blocking the way with his body. He spoke to someone inside, then closed the door again. "Wait," he told the biped.

After a few moments the door opened again and a pale, sweaty face appeared. It was a young man the biped had never seen before. "All right, bring it in. Quickly, quickly!"

"Always in a hurry, aren't you?" Otto grumbled. "Very well, go, then." He gave the biped a push.

Inside, the pale young man seized the biped's arm. "Go straight in, don't keep them waiting!" Beyond him, past the backs of several men who were standing close together, the biped glimpsed Grück's rotund figure behind a table. "And now," the Director's voice said nervously, "I present to you the biped, Fritz!"

The biped walked stiffly forward in the silence. The big room was packed with people, some standing with cameras, the rest seated at tables arranged in arcs all the way back to the far wall. Grück gave the biped an unreadable look as he approached. "Tell them your story, Fritz — or shall I say Herr Naumchik?" He bowed and stepped back, leaving the biped alone.

The biped cleared his throat with an unintended squawk, which caused a ripple of laughter around the room. Frightened and angry, he leaned forward and gripped the edge of the table.

"My name is Martin Naumchik," he began in a loud voice. The room quieted almost at once as he spoke, and he could feel the listeners' respectful attention. Gaining confidence, he told his story clearly and directly, beginning from the moment he had seen the young man with the camera outside his cage. As he talked, he looked around the room, hoping to see familiar faces,

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but the lights were so arranged that he could barely make out the features of those who were looking at him.

When he finished, there was a moment's silence, then a stir, and a forest of hands went up.

"You, there," said the biped, pointing helplessly at random. A woman rose. "Who told you to say all this?" she demanded. She had a sharp, indignant face, glittering eyes. A groan of protest went up around her.

"No one," said the biped firmly. "Next! You, there . . . yes, you, sir."

"You say you took a degree at the Sorbonne in 1999. Who was the head of the German department there?"

"Herr Winkler," the biped answered without hesitation, and pointed to another questioner.

"Who was your superior on *Paris-Soir* when you worked at the home office?"

"Claude Ehrichs."

MOST of the questions were the same ones he had answered before, many of them several times, at previous interviews; repeating the same responses over again made him feel a trace of discouragement. When would there be an end? But the attitude of the listeners cheered him: they were respectfully attentive, even friendly.

A tall, red-bearded man stood up. "Let me ask you this, Herr Naumchik. What is *your* explanation of this ineredible thing? How do you account for it?"

"I can't account for it," the biped said earnestly. "But I'm telling you the truth."

There was a murmur of sympathy as the tall man sat down. The biped opened his mouth to speak again, but before he could do so the mellifluous voice of Dr. Grück was heard. "That ends our little question period, thank you very much, gentlemen and ladies." Grück came forward, followed by two keepers who quickly took the biped's arms and started to lead him away.

The biped, at first taken by surprise, began to resist. "I'm not finished!" he shouted. "I appeal to you, make them release me!" In spite of his struggles, the keepers were dragging him farther away from the table. "Make them release me! I am Martin Naumchik!"

They were at the door. Behind them, an angry hum was arising from the audience. There were shouts of "Shame! Bring him back!" Over the growing uproar, Grück's voice was vainly repeating, "One moment, ladies and gentlemen! I beg your indulgence! One moment! One moment!"

The keepers thrust the biped

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outside; the door closed. The biped ceased to struggle. "Will you behave yourself?" demanded one of the keepers, straightening his collar.

Otto appeared through the crowd, his face as stolid as ever. "Go on, if I want you I call you," he grunted. "Fritz, come."

The biped followed him docilely, but his heart was thudding with excitement and indignation. "Did you hear it?" he demanded. "Did you hear how that man cut me off, just when—?"

"Not me," said Otto. "I don't concern myself with such things. I was sitting down and having a smoke." Avoiding the crowd, he pushed the biped toward a rear stairway. They walked down two flights, then crossed a library exhibit, threading their way between the tables and brushing through red banners that urged, "Read a book about animals!" This part of the building was almost deserted; so was the gallery.

As soon as Otto unlocked the outer door, the biped heard Grück's voice booming from within. His excitement increased again: he ran into the living room. In the television screen, Herr Doktor Grück's red, perspiring face stared wildly. "Gentlemen and ladies, if I may have your kind attention! Gentlemen and ladies!"

The voice of an invisible commentator cut in smoothly, "The hall is still in an uproar. The Herr Doktor is unable to make himself heard."

The biped danced with excitement in front of the screen, clasping his hands together. Outside, beyond the fence, a crowd was gathering, but he ignored it. The sound from the television had a curious echoing quality, and he realized after a moment that Emma must have her set turned on next door, too.

The noise was subsiding. Grück shouted, "Gentlemen and ladies — you have heard the biped's statement! Now permit the Director of the Zoo to make a statement also!"

There were scattered cheers. Silence fell, broken at first by coughs and the shuffling of feet. When it was complete, Grück spoke again.

"Let me ask you to think about one question," he said. "*Where* is Martin Naumchik?"

He glanced from side to side. The silence deepened. "Where is Naumchik, this enterprising newspaperman, who has scored such a triumph?" A mutter arose; the camera swung to show restless movement in the room, one or two people rising; indistinct voices were heard.

"Is he wandering the streets of Berlin, with an animal's soul inside his body?" Grück persisted.

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"Then why is he not seen? Isn't this a curious question, gentlemen and ladies? Doesn't this make you wonder, doesn't it arouse your interest? I ask again, *where* is this famous Martin Naumchik? Is he *hiding?*" He stared out at the camera, eyes gleaming behind his rimless glasses.

The biped clenched his fists involuntarily.

"Suppose that I now tell you we are all the victims of a clever hoax?" Grück demanded. There were hisses, groans of protest from the audience. "You don't believe it? You are too thoroughly convinced?"

A deep voice echoed up from somewhere in the audience. After a moment the camera swung around: it was the tall, red-bearded man who had spoken before. His voice grew clearer. " . . . this farce. Why did you hurry the biped out of sight — why isn't he here to speak for himself?" Cries of approval; the red-bearded man looked self-satisfied, and folded his arms on his chest.

Dr. Grück appeared again. "My dear Herr Wilenski — that is your name, is it not? — do you realize that if *I* am telling you the truth—" he carefully smote his plump breast — "this biped is a very valuable animal, very high-strung and nervous, which must be protected? Am I to endanger his health? Do you think I am such a fool?" A little laughter; scattered shouts of approval.

The red-bearded man popped into view again, aiming his finger sternly. "What about the biped's charge that you drugged him? What have you to say to that?"

Then Grück's earnest face, in close-up: "Somehow the animal got hold of a piece of soap, Herr Wilenski. The keeper who was responsible has been—"

("Soap?" echoed Wilenski's voice.)

"Yes, soap. The sodium and potassium salts in soap have a toxic effect on these bipeds. You must remember that they are not human beings, Herr Wilenski." He raised one plump hand. "Let me continue." Mutterings from the audience. "But first let me say this to you, Herr Wilenski, and to all of you — if I shall not convince you that we have to do here with a hoax, a dirty publicity scheme — if you shall have listened to me and still believe that in that poor biped's body there is the soul of a human being — then I solemnly promise you that I will release Martin Naumchik!"

Sensation in the hall. The biped closed his eyes and groped weakly behind him for the chair. His relief was so great that he

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did not hear the next few words from the screen.

"—we here at the Zoo were just as much in the dark as you, you may believe me! How could such a thing occur? We did not believe the biped's story for a moment — yet, what other explanation could be found? We were at our wits' end, gentlemen and ladies — until we had the lucky inspiration to search the biped's cage! Then! Imagine our shock, our horror, when we found . . . this!"

The camera drew back. Grück, half turning, was extending his hand in a dramatic gesture toward a machine that lay on a little table behind him. An assistant wheeled it closer. It was, as far as the biped could make out, nothing but a solid-state recorder, the same kind of machine Opatescu had used . . .

A cold feeling took him in the chest. He leaned forward uneasily.

"Under the blankets of the biped's bed," Grück's voice went on, "we found this recording machine concealed!"

"How did it get there?" boomed Wilenski's voice.

Grück's face turned; his expresion was solemn. "We are still investigating this," he said. "And you may believe me, that when the guilty individuals are caught, they shall be punished with the full severity of the law! But at this moment, I can say only that we are highly interested in questioning the keeper who was discharged." He stepped closer to the small table, laid his hand on the recorder. "Now, I want you all to listen to what we found in this concealed machine! Listen carefully!"

He switched on the recorder.

After a moment, a man's deep voice spoke. "Listen and repeat after me. My name is Martin Naumchik . . . I was born at Asnieres in 1976 . . . I am a newspaperman. I work for *Paris-Soir*. My superior there is Monsieur Claude Ehrichs . . ."

A distant murmur came through the glass. The biped turned his head involuntarily, and saw a little knot of people clostered around the aerial of a portable TV. Fists were being shaken. Voices drifted over, faintly: "Charlatan! Hoaxer!"

With a sense of doom, the biped turned back to the screen. The camera was panning now over the faces of the listeners. He saw shock and surprise give way to cynical understanding, disgust or anger. People were beginning to stand up here and there throughout the room; some were leaving. The biped saw the red-bearded man, shaking his head, move off toward the aisle.

"Wait! Wait!" he called. But

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the man in the screen did not hear.

The room was emptying. The monotonous voice of the recorder had stopped. Grück was standing idly looking out over the room, with a faint smile of satisfaction on his lips. Wenzl leaned over to speak to him; Grück nodded absently. His lips pursed: he was whistling.

"And so," said the voice of the announcer breathlessly, "in this dramatic revelation, the mystery of the human biped is explained! All honor to Herr Doktor Grück for his dignified handling of this difficult situation! We now return you to our studios."

The screen flickered, cleared. The biped hit the control button blindly with his fist; the image faded, dwindled and was gone.

"Ssss! Fritz the faker! Ssss!" came the voices from outside.

THE uproar in the Aviary redoubled the moment Wenzl strode in. Toucans opened their gigantic beaks, flapped their wings and screamed. The air was full of fluttering smaller birds, flash of tail feathers, red, yellow, blue. Macaws left off hitching themselves along their wooden perches, beak, claw, beak, claw, to flutter against the invisible air fence shrieking, "Rape! Rape!"

Wenzl strode past them, his death's-head face like a pale shark swimming down the green corridor of the Aviary.

At the far end of the building, two under-keepers stood to attention. All was in order here. Wenzl crossed the short open entranceway, making a path through the sluggish crowds, and went into the Primate House.

Shrieks, roars and the thunder of shaken bars greeted him as he stepped through the doorway. Capuchins hurtled forward over one another's backs, clustering at the bars, showing their sharp yellow teeth, shrieking their little lungs out. Proboscis monkeys dropped out of their tree-limb perches, blinking and chattering. The baboon, Hugo, leaped against his bars with a crash, shoved off and somersaulted in midair, flashing his blue behind; the two chimps rattled the bars and squealed together.

Wenzl moved along the row of cages, attentive and calm. He passed through another open entrance to the Reptile House.

Here all was quiet. Wenzl's glance softened for the first time. The Galapagos tortoise, big as a wheelbarrow, was slowly munching a head of lettuce in his cruel jaws. The boa constrictor was coiled sluggishly around a conspicuous lump in its gullet. Four diamondbacks hissed, clattered faintly, slithered off into their rocky den.

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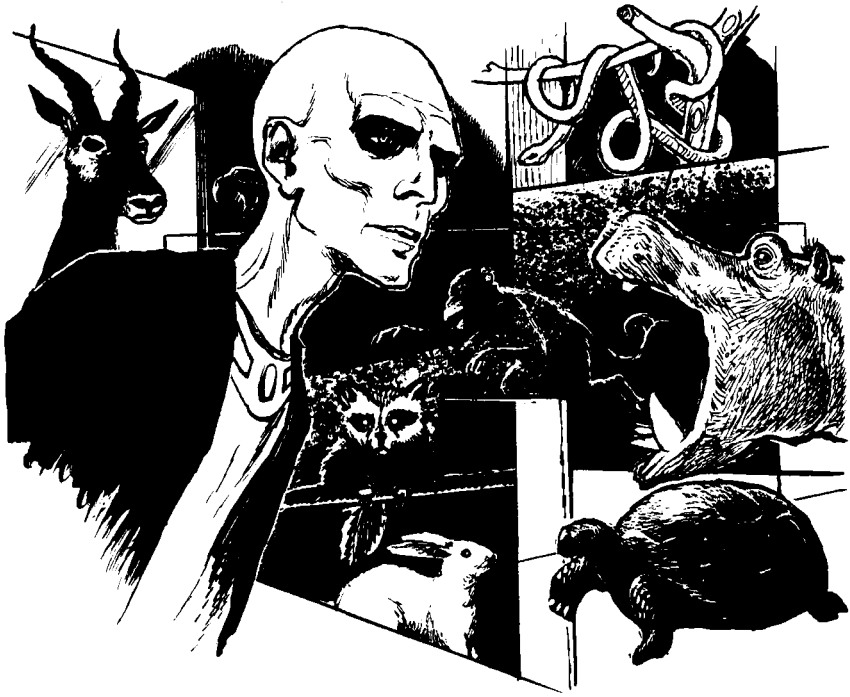

In its floodlighted cage, the grass snake hung in graceful festoons. Its tiny head swayed toward Wenzl; the pink tongue flickered out. Wenzl paused an instant to regard it with pleasure. Then he moved on.

In the Terrestrial Mammal House, there was a crowd around the rhinoceros wallow, where Prinzmetal was giving the rhino an injection. Finished, he climbed over the rail and joined Wenzl, mopping his brow with a tissue.

"Successful?" Wenzl demanded.

"Oh, yes, I think so," said Prinzmetal in his soft, unassuming voice. "He will be all right."

"It is necessary for him to be all right."

"Oh, well, he will be." They walked through the exit together, turned right, opened a door marked "No Admittance."

A slender, flaxen-haired young keeper was hurrying toward them, carrying a pail of fish.

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"Schildt, why are you not feeding the sea lions?" Wenzl demanded severely.

"Just going now, sir!" said the unfortunate keeper, stiffening to attention.

"Then what are you waiting for? Go!"

"Yes, sir!"

Wenzl, as he strode along beside Prinzmetal, took a tiny notebook from his breast pocket and with a tiny silver pencil, sharp as a bodkin, made a minuscule entry in it. Prinzmetal watched him with one soft brown eye, but made no comment.

"Have you seen the papers?" Prinzmetal asked, as they rode up in the elevator.

"Yes," said Wenzl. They got out. Wenzl hesitated, then followed Prinzmetal into the latter's washroom.

"What papers did you mean, exactly?" he asked.

Prinzmetal, looking surprised, straightened up from the basin where he had begun washing his hands. "Oh — there it is, on the table. The *Zeitung*. On the third page. There's a story about a baby in Buenos Aires that understands what you say to it in French, Spanish and German. Three months old."

"Yes."

"And the curious thing—what struck my attention—"

"Is that child's French nursemaid underwent an attack of amentia at the same time," said Wenzl, biting his words.

"Yes," Prinzmetal said, forgetting to wash.

"She is incontinent," said Wenzl.

"Yes."

"She understands nothing, must be fed, can only make childish sounds. But the child understands French, German and Spanish."

"So, you saw the paper," said Prinzmetal.

"And you, did you see this in the *Tageblatt?*" Wenzl asked, almost unwillingly. He took a folded newspaper from his breast pocket. "A man and his wife in Tasmania each claims to be the other."

"I heard also, on the television, that while laying a cornerstone in Aberdeen, the mayor changed into a naked young girl, who ran away crying," said Prinzmetal. "But who knows what those fellows make up and what is true?"

"Supposing it should all be true?" Wenzl asked, folding his paper neatly and putting it away.

"It would be interesting," said Prinzmetal, turning his attention to his soft, hairy hands, which he began to scrub with care.

"And?"

"It is our duty to report to the Director anything that might be of importance to the work of the

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Zoo," said Prinzmetal, as if reciting a lesson.

"On the other hand," said Wenzl deliberately, "It is useless, and even has a harmful effect, to take up the Herr Doktor's time with baseless newspaper scandal."

The two men looked at each other for a moment with complete understanding in their eyes. "After all," said Prinzmetal, drying his hands, "what would be the good of it?"

"Exactly," said Wenzl, and folding his newspaper precisely lengthwise, he dropped it into the waste can.

VIII

WHEN the young man woke up, he was in a narrow bed in a white-tiled room. Wires that came out of the bed were stuck to his head, arms and legs with sticky elastic bands. He plucked at them irritably, but they would not come off.

He looked around. There was a doorway, open, but no window. In the corner, behind a single wall that half concealed it, was a w.c. In the other corner was a flimsy plastic chair and a reading light, but nothing to read.

The young man tried to get up, pulling at the wires, and discovered they had silvery joints that would break apart. He got out of bed, trailing the wires.

After a moment a stout woman in nurse's uniform came in, and clucked her tongue at him. "Up, are you? Who told you you could?"

"I want to use the w.c.," he told her plaintively.

"Well, go ahead, then back into bed with you. Herr Doktor Hölderlein hasn't seen you yet." To his mild surprise, she stood with hands folded in front of her and watched while he used the toilet. Then she pushed him back and made him lie down, while she snicked the silvery jonts of the wires together again, all around the bed. "Lie still," she told him. "No more nonsense. Here is the bell — ring if you want anything."

She showed him a plastic knob on the end of a flex cord, and went away, "Am I sick?" he called after her, but she did not come back.

The young man tried once more to pull off the elastic bands, then gave it up. His last memories were confused. He could remember falling into the net, and being held down while he struggled. Then a feeling of being carried, a glimpse of many legs walking. . . . Then nothing, until he found himself in a white-walled tiny room with bars instead of a door. His clothes were gone, and he was wearing gray

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pajamas. No one had come in answer to his calling, until he began to bang on the bars with a steel pot he found in the room, and then a man came and squirted water on him from a spray-gun. So he did not bang any more, but sat and shivered.

He remembered falling asleep and waking up at least twice in that room. Once he had been fed. Then two men had come to fetch him, and they had given him his own clothes again, and coffee to drink, which he liked. Then they had taken him down a long corridor into a crowded room, and told him to wait. At the end of the room, behind a high counter, was a man in red robes, with a red floppy hat. The young man knew from his watching of television that this man was a judge, and that he was going to be sentenced . . .

Now, here he was in still another place. Time passed. The young man was growing hungry, but did not dare ring the bell. At last an orderly came in with a cart, and he was allowed to sit up and eat. It was almost like the Zoo. Then the orderly came back for his plate, and hooked him up to the wires again; and for a long time nothing else happened.

The young man was bewildered. Why was he here? What had the judge and that other man been whispering about, down at the end of the room, and why had the judge looked so annoyed when he glanced his way?

This place was better than the jail, it would not do to complain —but if he was not sick, then why was he here?

Bells tinkled outside. Every now and then people passed his doorway, walking rapidly, with soft soles that swished and squeaked on the tile floor.

Then the nurse came in again. "You are in luck," she told him. "Herr Doktor Hölderlein says you may see Herr Doktor Boehmer today." She yanked his wires apart briskly, then helped him up. "Come, don't keep the doctor waiting!"

SHE took his elbow and led him down the hall, where messages in colored letters rippled silently along the walls, to an office where a man with a bushy mustache sat behind a desk. On the desk was a card that said "Hr. Dr. Boehmer."

The doctor gave the young man a long measuring look, and unscrewed a thick old-fashioned tacrograph slowly. "Sit down, please." He began writing on a pad. "Now then. Can you tell me your name?"

The young man hesitated only a moment. If he said "Fritz," he knew very well they would send him back to the Zoo. "Martin

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Naumchik, Herr Doktor," he said.

"Occupation?"

"Journalist."

The doctor nodded slowly, writing. "And your address?"

"Gastnerstrasse."

"And the number?"

The young man tried to remember, but could not.

Doktor Boehmer pursed his heavy lips. "You seem a little confused. How long is it since you were in your apartment in Gastnerstrasse?"

The young man shifted uncomfortably. "I think, three—or, no, four days."

"You really don't remember." Doktor Boehmer wrote something slowly, in his thick black handwriting, across the ruled pad. The young man watched him with apprehension.

"Well then, perhaps you can tell me the date?"

"June 10th, Herr Doktor . . . or perhaps the 11th."

Boehmer's bushy eyebrows went up a trifle. "Very good. And who is the president of the High Council, can you tell me that?"

"Herr Professor Onderdonck . . . is that right?"

"No, not quite right. He was president last year." Bohmer wrote something else slowly on the pad. "Well now." He folded his heavy arms across the pad, holding the big black tacrograph as if it were a cigar. "Tell me, do you remember being in the department store?"

"Oh, yes, Herr Doktor."

"And hiding upstairs, and coming down during the day?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor."

"And why did you do that?"

The young man hesitated, opening and closing his mouth several times.

"You can tell me, Herr Naumchik. Go ahead. Why did you do it?"

The young man said helplessly, "Because I had nowhere else to go, Herr Doktor."

Boehmer slowly unfolded his arms and made another mark on the pad. He reached without looking and touched a bell-push at the corner of his desk. "I see. Well then, Herr Naumchik, tomorrow at the same time, is it agreed?"

"Yes, Herr Doktor." The nurse entered and stood holding the door open. The young man rose docilely and went out.

"Doctor says you can sleep without the wires tonight," said the nurse briskly as they entered his room again. Breathing heavily through her nose, she stood close to him and began peeling off the elastic bands. "Don't squirm," she said.

"It hurts."

"Nonsense, this takes only a moment. There." She wadded up the bands, wrapped the wires

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around them and turned to leave. "Lie down now, rest."

"But nurse, why do I have to be here? Am I sick?" the young man asked.

She turned and stared at him briefly. "Of course, you are sick. But you are getting much better. Now rest." She waddled out.

AFTER a long time there was supper, and then pills to swallow. When he woke up, it was morning again.

"Good news!" cried the nurse, entering to plump up his pillows. "You have a visitor today!"

"I have?" the young man asked. His heart began to beat faster. He could not imagine who it could be. Someone from the Zoo?

"A young *lady*," said the nurse archly.

"What's her name? I don't know any young lady."

"All in good time. Eat your breakfast now, then comes the barber to shave you, and next you will see your friend."

She left. The young man rubbed at the furry growth on his cheeks and chin. Shaving he knew, but not how it was done. It would be good to be shaved.

After breakfast the barber came in, a short, dark man in a white coat, who plugged a buzzing machine into the wall and applied it, with a bored expression, to the young man's whiskers. At first it pulled and hurt him, then it was better, and at last the hair was all gone. His skin stopped itching and felt delightfully smooth to the touch.

He waited impatiently. An orderly came and gave him a comb, and he combed his hair in the mirror, several ways, until he thought it was correct.

Then he still had to wait. At last the nurse came in again, looked at him critically, and said, "Very good! Follow me!"

She took him to a little room with windows, rather bare and clean, with upholstered chairs and magazines in a rack. In the room stood a woman in a blue dress. There was a man in a white coat a little behind her. Glancing from one to the other, the young man recognized Herr Doktor Boehmer almost at once, but it was only when the woman stepped forward that he knew her. She was the woman in the store—the one who had slapped him.

"Oh, my poor Martin, what has happened to you?" she wailed, putting out her arms.

The young man stepped back nervously. "They say I am sick," he muttered, watching her closely.

"You identify our young friend, then, Frau Schorr?" asked the doctor amiably.

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"He doesn't remember me," she said in a tight voice. "But it's Martin, of course it's Martin."

"And you are his—"

The woman bit her lip. "His sister. Will they let me take him away, Herr Doktor, do you think?"

"That depends on many things, Frau Schorr," said the doctor severely. "Come into my office when you are finished, and let us discuss it in detail."

"Yes, in a moment," she said, turning back to the young man. "Martin, you would like to go with me?"

He hesitated. It was true that she did not seem so excitable as before, but who knew when the mood might not take her again?

"To get away from this place?" she asked.

The young man made up his mind. "Yes, please, I would like it."

She smiled at him and turned to the doctor. "Very good, Herr Doktor, now I am at your service. Until very soon, Martin . . ." They both went out. In a few moments the nurse came to lead him back to his cubicle.

Then, although the young man waited expectantly, nothing happened except lunch. After the meal was cleared away he waited again, growing indignant, but hours went by and still no one came.

The orderly brought his dinner. He began to feel frightened. Suppose something had gone wrong, and the woman was never coming back at all?

The nurse would not answer his questions, but kept repeating stupid things like, "Wait and see. Don't be so impatient. Why are you in such a hurry?" She gave him pills to take, and insisted on hooking him up to the wires again. Then he woke up, and again it was morning.

"Good news!" cried the nurse cheerily, entering the room. "They are going to release you today!"

"THEY are?" the young man asked eagerly. He tried to clamber out of bed, but was brought up short. "Devil take them!" he shouted, tearing at the wires. "Nurse, get me my clothes!"

"Temper, temper!" she said, raising her hands in mock dismay. "Can't you wait even till after breakfast? Such impatience!" She disconnected the wires at the joints and tucked them neatly away. "Nothing was ever done in a hurry," she went on. "There, go, wash yourself. All in good time." She bustled out.

The young man cleaned himself and combed his hair again. It was hard to sit still. Breakfast came and he ate some of it, thinking, "Now she is almost here."

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But more hours passed in the same endless way as before. What could have gone wrong? He stood in the doorway and waited for the nurse; at last she came.

He held out his hand. "Nurse, when are they going to let me out?"

"Soon, soon," she said, slipping past him. "Go and comb your hair—don't worry. It won't be long."

"But you said that this morning!" the young man shouted after her. It was no use. She was gone.

When he had been sitting for a long time, staring blankly at the floor, an orderly came in. "Your hair is a *fright*," he said. The orderly himself had carefully waved hair, gleaming with oil. "Here, use my comb," he said.

"When are they going to let me go?"

"I don't know. Soon," the orderly said indifferently, and went away.

Lunch time came. Now the young man realized that it was all a cruel joke. He lay down on the bed, leaving his dishes untouched.

There was a clatter at the door. The orderly entered, pushing a metal rack on which some clothes were hung. Watching incredulously, the young man recognized the trousers and surcoat he had been wearing before; the coat was ripped up the side, and the sleeve was grimy with some sticky, odorous mass.

"Put them on," said the orderly. "Orders." He went away again.

The young man dressed himself awkwardly. His heart was beating very fast, and he had trouble deciding which way some of the things went on. At last he was done, and he combed his hair carefully all over again.

Then he waited. Footsteps came and went hurriedly in the corridor; white-jacketed figures passed and repassed. A bell jangled, and a boy in a purple robe went by carrying a candle in a glass bowl, followed by a man in black robes, head down, mumbling something to himself. The bell dwindled in the distance.

A burst of laughter sounded from somewhere not far away. "Well, you know what *I* would have told him!" a hearty male voice exclaimed. Then two voices began speaking together, in lower tones, and the young man could not make out any more of the words.

Footsteps approached the door again. In walked a woman.

AT FIRST he did not recognize her as Frau Schorr. She was more formally dressed than the day before, in a puffed skirt and overdress under which the shape of her body could hardly be made out. She looked pale

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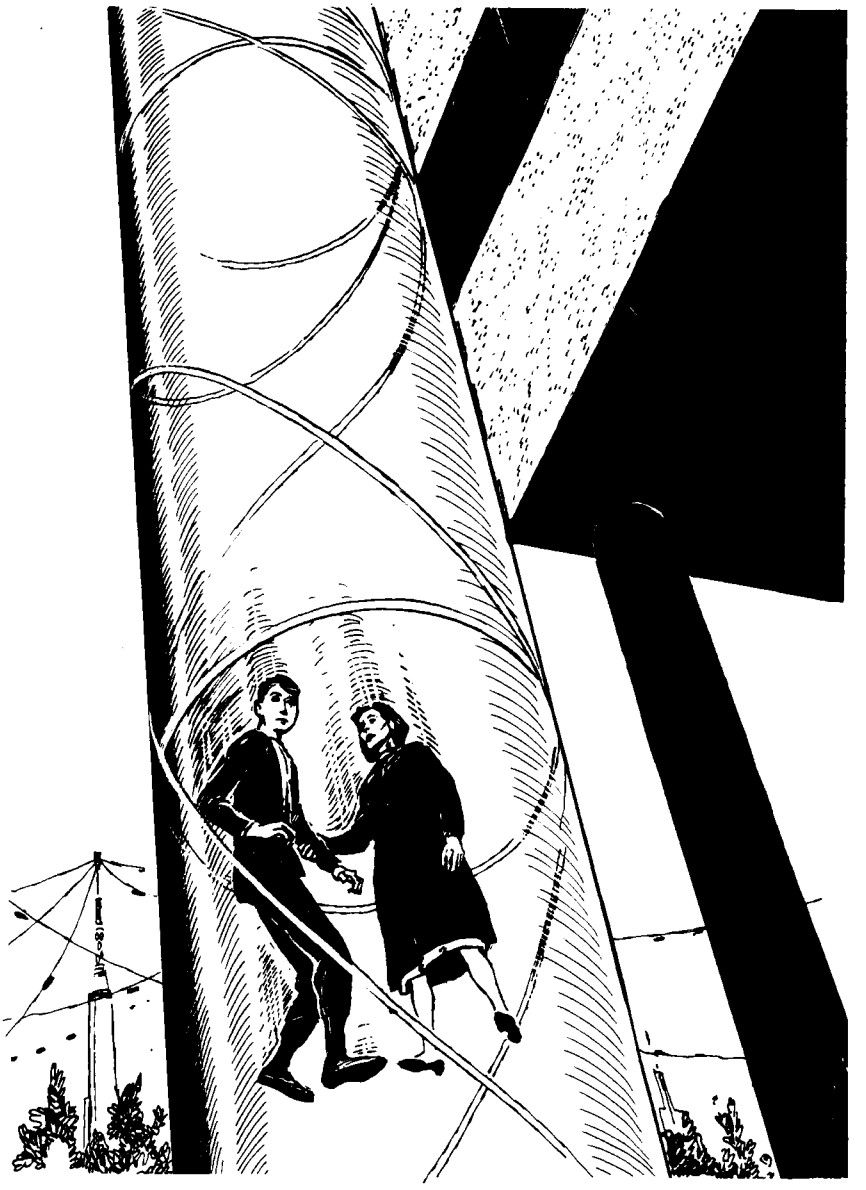

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and nervous and did not meet his eyes.

"Martin, they promised they would release you at nine-thirty this morning," she said at once, "and here it is almost—"

"Madame Schorr," the orderly interrupted, putting his head in at the door, "they are blinking for you to come down to the office at once."

"Oh, my God!" said the woman and, turning around, she walked out again.

The young man waited. At last Frau Schorr entered, walking rapidly. This time she looked flushed and energetic. "Come, quickly," she said, taking his arm, "before they change their minds."

"I can go?" he asked.

"Yes, it is all arranged. Hurry!"

She led him down the white hall, past the blinking colored letters on the wall. There were potted plants at every intersection of corridors — always the same plant, with shiny saw-toothed leaves.

They got into a rapid elevator of the kind the young man had seen in the store. It opened for them, clicked shut and with a dizzy swoop they were hurtling downward; then another swoop in the reverse direction, a click, and they were standing on the gray tile floor of a large lobby, with enormous windows of clear glass through which the young man could see the central tower of the Flugbahn, glittering in the sunlight against a sky of pure blue.

"Hurry!" said the woman, leading him to another elevator. This one was the spiral kind. They dropped through a glass tube, past dark walls at first, then, startlingly, into the daylight.

What had happened to the building? The young man craned his neck, saw the titanic slab of masonry receding above his head. They had emerged from the bottom of the hospital, which was supported high in the air on concrete legs. Around them bright green lawns and flowering shrubs were visible. Only one other building could be seen in the middle distance, and that was a single, carelessly carved block of pink stone, without windows or visible entrances. Beyond, the rooftops of a few buildings showed over the treetops.

The elevator went underground without pausing, and a moment later they were in the white, flat light of a subterranean tunnel. As they left the elevator, an oval car drifted up on two fat wheels. It stopped, and the transparent top swung open. There was no driver.

The young man hung back, but Frau Schorr urged him in. They sat down on the deep cushions; the top hesitated, then slowly dropped and latched with a

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click. The woman leaned forward. "Take us to the Fiedler Platz exit, please."

After a pause, a mechanical voice spoke from the grille facing them. "That will be two marks ten, please." The woman fumbled in her purse, found a piece of paper money and put it into a slot beside the grille. "Thank you," said the voice; coins clattered into a metal cup. The woman picked them out carefully and put them away as the car glided into motion.

They did not seem to be moving fast, but the young man felt himself pressed back into the cushions, and the white lights of the tunnel whisked by at a dizzying rate.

Other cars were visible far ahead and behind. Now the tunnel forked, the left-hand branch turning downward, the right-hand one up. Their car whirled to the left without losing speed. At a second fork, they turned right, rising again.

The car glided to a stop beside an elevator, identical to the one they had taken from the hospital. The top swung back.

A little dizzy from so much rapid motion, the young man followed the woman into the elevator. As the car rose in the tube, another car with two men and a child in it whirled down past them in the counter-spiral. It made the young man feel ill to watch them, and he shut his eyes.

NOW they were aboveground once more. The street was full of cool blue shadow, but over their heads the sun was still warm on the facades. Taking his arm again, the woman led him across the empty pavement to one of the entrances, over which the young man read the number "109" in silver letters.

In the lobby, she paused, one gloved hand going to her mouth. "You have your key?" she asked.

"Key?" The young man explored his pockets, brought up the key on the gold ring. "Is this it?"

She took it with relief. "Yes, I'm quite sure. Come."

They entered another elevator, an ordinary straight-up one this time, and the woman spoke to the grille, "Three."

They emerged into a narrow hallway carpeted in beige and green. Frau Schorr led the way directly to a door numbered 3C, opened it with the key.

Inside, they found themselves in greenish dimness.

The room was small, with a narrow bed, a table with some coffee things, a typewriter on a desk. There was no dust, but the air had a stale, bottled-up smell.

The woman crossed to the windows and threw back the green

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draperies, letting in the sunlight. She touched a button on the control panel over the bed, and at once fresh air began to whisper into the room.

"Well, here you are then!" said the woman happily. "Your own little room again . . ." She paused. "But you don't remember this, either?"

The young man was looking around. He had never seen the room before, and did not much care for it. "Isn't there any television?" he asked.

The woman studied him for a moment, then went to the control panel again, touched another button. A picture on the wall opened and folded back, revealing a TV screen, which instantly bloomed into life. A man's smiling face loomed toward them, gigantic, all-swallowing, while laughter roared from the wall. Then the sound died, the open-mouthed face shrank and disappeared as the woman touched the controls again.

The halves of the picture jerked, flapped, slid together.

"What's the matter?" asked the woman.

"I didn't know it was going to do that," said the young man, quivering.

She looked at him thoughtfully. "I see." She put the tips of her gloved fingers to her lips. "Martin, you know this is your own room. It doesn't remind you at all? I thought perhaps when you saw it—no. I think it's better that you don't stay here, Martin. Come, help me."

She crossed briskly to the opposite wall, slid back a panel, took out two pieces of luggage. She laid them open on the bed, then crossed the room again, pulled a drawer out of the wall, scooped up a pile of clothing. "Here, take these." She dumped the clothing into his arms. "You put everything on the bed, I'll pack."

"But where are we going?" he asked, carrying his burden obediently across the room.

"To my apartment," she said. She picked up the clothes, straightened them neatly, began to pack them into the larger of the two suitcases. "Go, get more."

THE YOUNG man went back, found another drawer under the first. There were nothing but socks in this one. He brought dutifully over to the bed.

"And if Frau Biefleder doesn't like it, let her choke!" said the woman, punching shirts down into the open suitcase with brisk, angry motions.

Understanding nothing, the young man did as he was told. All the clothing, including two sets of overgarments, went into the larger suitcase. The other

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case, which was very flat and narrow, was filled with papers from the desk. Frau Schorr took both suitcases, and the young man carried the typewriter in its case. They went down again in the elevator, across the street, down the other elevator, and got into a cab exactly like the one that had brought them.

This time they emerged into a more populous street. Carrying their suitcases, they crossed the open area past a group of strolling girls, a tall boy on a unicycle, a flower vender.

There were shops on either side, with interesting things displayed in their windows, but Frau Schorr would not let him linger. They turned the first corner to the left, entered a building faced with blue stone. In the lobby sat a little white-haired old lady with a face full of wrinkles. "Good afternoon, Frau Beifelder," said Frau Schorr stiffly. The old woman did not reply, but stared after them with tiny, red-rimmed eyes.

"It's good for her to be shocked a little, after all," muttered Frau Schorr as they crowded into the elevator. She looked distressed. The young man would have liked to comfort her, but did not understand what was the matter, so he said nothing.

Upstairs, the hall was tiny, with only two red-enameled doors. "Well, here we are at last!" said the woman brightly, opening the first of these.

Inside was a sunny and comfortable-looking room, with bright colors in the upholstery and rugs. As they entered, a tawny cat leaped down from the window seat and came toward them, pale blue eyes staring from a masked face.

The young man looked at it in surprise. He had never seen a housecat before, except in pictures—only the big ones in the Zoo, and those from a distance.

"Is it fierce?" he asked.

"Maggie?" said the woman, looking puzzled. "Whatever do you mean?" She stooped to pick up the cat, which was staring at the young man with its back arched, making a low wailing noise. When she lifted it, it hung limply from her hand for a moment like a furpiece, then writhed once and leaped to the floor.

The wailing sound grew louder. The fur along the cat's back was ruffled.

"Oh, dear!" said the woman. "Maggie, don't you remember Martin?" She turned to him in bewilderment. "She is upset. Sit down, dear, everything is going to be all right. Take off your surcoat and rest a little. You shall have some coffee and sandwiches in a moment." The cat was advancing, stiff-legged; she pushed

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it away with her foot. With an angry screech, it retreated to the windowseat again and tucked itself together into a ball. Its blue eyes grew narrow, but whenever the young man moved they widened and its mouth opened in a sharp-toothed smile.

"I can't imagine what is the matter with her," said Frau Schorr from the next room. A cupboard door banged shut; a pot clattered. "She is such an affectionate creature, and she always liked you, Martin."

Wanting to examine a picture on the opposite wall, the young man took one or two steps toward it, watching the cat out of the corner of his eye.

The animal stared back at him and made a faint hissing noise, but did not move. Emboldened, the young man crossed the room and looked at the picture closely, but still could not decide what it represented.

BAFFLED, he turned away, just as something squat and dirty-white waddled into view from the hall doorway. It looked up at him out of tiny red eyes and made a wheezing sound. Spittle hung from the loose lips of its enormously wide mouth, and two discolored fangs stuck up from the lower jaw. It stared at the young man in astonishment for a moment, then the gray-white hair on its shoulders rose stiffly and it made a menacing noise. The young man raised a hand. The animal began to bark, dancing about in the doorway, its eyes bulging insanely to show the yellowish, bloodshot whites.

The young man backed away as far as he could go.

"Churchill!" called the woman from the kitchen. The dog turned its head toward her voice, but went on barking. "Churchill!" she called again, and in a moment came hurriedly into the room, wiping her hands on her apron. "Shame!" she said, glancing at the young man. "Churchill, what is the matter with you?" The barking continued.

"Now then!" said the woman, slapping the infuriated animal on the snout with her palm. The dog hiccoughed, shook its head and stared up at her with a surprised expression. It barked once more. The woman slapped it again, more gently. "No, Churchill — shame! This is Martin, don't you remember? He has forgotten you," she said apologetically over her shoulder. "Go on now, back to your rug, Churchill. Bad dog, go on!" She herded the dog through the doorway. It moved stiffly backward, then turned reluctantly and disappeared, wheezing and snuffling. A final bark sounded from the next room.

"Oh, dear," said the woman.

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"I'm so sorry, Martin. Excuse me a moment—the coffee." She went back into the kitchen, and the young man, slightly unnerved, began trotting back and forth beside the low bookshelves, looking at the titles of the books.

At the far corner of the room he came upon a tiny cage suspended from a polished brass stand. There was a beige cloth cover on the cage. Curious, he plucked up the edge of the cloth and peered inside. In the dimness, a tiny bird with green and violet feathers was perched on a miniature trapeze. One pin-sized golden eye blinked at him; the creature said, "Weep?"

The young man closed the cover again. "It is just like the Zoo," he thought.

The woman returned, looking flustered, with a tray in her hands. On the tray were sandwiches and coffee. She set it down on the table in front of the sofa. "Now come, eat, Martin, you must be hungry." She made him sit on the sofa, and while he dutifully ate the sandwiches and drank the good coffee, she sat opposite him in the upholstered chair, hands clasped in her lap, smiling faintly as she watched him eat. Her cheeks were flushed with exertion. A few strands of dark hair had escaped from her coiffure and hung over her forehead.

"Yes, eat, that is good," she said. "Would you like some music, Martin?" The young man nodded, with his mouth full. The woman rose, went to a machine in the corner and punched several buttons. After a moment the machine began to emit music, something slow and soothing, played by an orchestra with many violins. The young man listened with pleasure, waving his sandwich.

The woman sighed, then smiled. "No. You don't remember, do you?" she asked.

"Remember what?"

"The music. We used often to dial it . . . never mind." She crossed to the machine again and touched it; the music stopped. "But it's really true, then, that you don't remember anything?"

"I think I do," said the young man, lying cautiously. "You are my sister—"

"No!" said the woman vehemently. "That's not true at all. You don't remember." Her mouth was compressed and her eyes were closed.

"But then why did you tell the doctor that you were my sister?" the young man demanded, bewildered.

"Because I had to be a member of your family, or they would not have let me sign you out."

The young man swallowed, thinking this over. He laid his

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sandwich down. "But if you are not my sister—"

"Yes?"

"Then what are you?"

The woman's face colored, and she glanced away. "Never mind, Martin . . . just a friend. We are just friends. Hand me those cigarettes, won't you, Martin?"

He followed her glance; there was nothing on the low table beside him but an ashtray and an enameled box. He lifted the lid: Correct, there were cigarettes inside.

She took one, lit it with a tiny rose-quartz lighter, tilted her head back to puff out a long streamer of smoke. With her left hand she was absently setting the black pieces in their places.

"Don't you want one?" she asked.

The young man looked dubiously at the white cylinders. He had never tried to smoke a cigarette, but doubtless it was one of the things he should learn.

He put one gingerly between his lips, took it out again and looked at it, then replaced it and touched the other end with the lighter. He sucked cautiously; the cigarette glowed. Cool, bitter-tasting smoke ran into his mouth. Before he realized what he was doing, he breathed some of it into his lungs, where it felt astonishingly good. He took another pull at the cigarette. He realized with grateful delight that the smoke was somehow soothing one of the urgent discomforts he had been feeling all this time, ever since he had left the Zoo.

"How good that is!" he said, staring at the burning cylinder.

The woman's eyes filled with tears. She leaned forward and put put her cheek against his. Her arms went around him convulsively.

"Oh, darling, had you forgotten that too?" she said weeping.

IX

THE BIPED awoke. The room was flooded with pale, colorless morning light. He got slowly out of bed, clacking his jaws. What day was this? He could not remember. But what did it matter, anyhow?

He could hear Emma in the office space, already clattering away at the orthotyper. The biped got a drink of water, glanced into his outer room—no one was at the railing as yet, the Zoo was not open so early—then wandered into the office space and sat down at his desk.

The basket was piled with work he had not finished yesterday, but it was only accounting forms. Nowadays they gave him nothing else to do. He picked up the top one, then set it down again without even trying to read

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it; it was too much trouble.

The female said something in a low voice. In his surprise at hearing her speak, he missed the words.

"What?"

She said, without pausing or looking up from her work: "Do you think you are the only one who is unlucky? I don't."

The biped gaped at her. "What do you mean by that?"

"Some others, also, have a difficult life." She whipped the page neatly out of her machine, added it to the stack beside her. She inserted another page, spaced down, began typing again.

The biped felt vaguely insulted. He snorted. "What do you know about it?"

Before she could reply, the outer door clicked. Emma stopped typing. They both turned to watch Otto come in with his cart. "Breakfast," said the man gruffly. "Here, take it, eat, don't waste my time." He dumped a basket of work on the biped's desk, then another on Emma's.

Blinking angrily, the biped picked up his covered plate and carried it into his own room.

What did the creature mean by it? Who was she, to speak to him in that way?

His anger grew; he could hardly eat. He put the plate aside half-finished, went back into the office space. Emma was not there.

He walked aimlessly around for a while, kicking at the gray tiles. Here was the scuffed mark, almost invisible, where Grück had drawn a chalk line across the room. There was irony for you! To protect Emma from him, as if he were some sort of crude beast, whereas in reality it was just the other way around.

He heard a noise, and turned to see the female coming out of her room. She paused. Her hands went to the knob on her head.

"Look here, Emma," the biped began a little uncertainly.

"You are on my side of the room," she piped.

"Oh, hang that! What does it matter, any more?" The biped took a step toward her, growing excited. "Look here, just because you've lived in a Zoo all your life, I suppose you think—"

She snapped something, and moved past him to her desk.

"What was that?" the biped demanded irritably. "Speak up."

"I said, I have not lived in a Zoo all my life." The female put on her earphones, rolled paper into the machine, began to type.

"Well, perhaps not in this Zoo, but you were born in a Zoo somewhere, weren't you?"

Emma glanced up. "I was born on Brecht's Planet. They came and took me away when I was a baby." Her typing resumed.

The biped felt he had some-

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how been put in the wrong. "Well, of course that's too bad and so forth, but don't you see the difference?" He began to speak more vehemently, warming to his subject. "My God, I should think it's obvious enough. Here are you, an animal that's spent most of its life in one Zoo or another —you're used to it, you can put up with it. And here am I, a man shut up in an animal's body, kept in this stinking cage day after day!"

While he was speaking, the female had stopped her work, and now sat looking quietly down at her three-fingered hands on the keyboard.

After a moment, she got up from her chair and began to walk past him. Her eyes were closed. The biped saw that her throat was working convulsively.

"Oh, now, wait a minute," he said, stricken.

She kept on walking. When a desk got in her way, she maneuvered around it by using her hands.

"Look here, Emma," the biped said, "I didn't want to hurt your feelings or anything. The fact is, I got carried away. I didn't mean the cage is actually stinking, it was just an expression."

The female disappeared into her room. Irritated again, the biped followed as far as the doorway. "Come out, Emma!" he shouted. "Haven't I said I was sorry?"

Emma did not reply. Although the biped hung sulkily around the office space for hours, she did not come out for the rest of the morning.

"BUT tell me," Neumann was saying at lunch that afternoon, under the shifting colored lights of the rotunda, "in all seriousness, my dear Grück, what was the truth of the matter? You managed it so cleverly that I am still confused. Is the biped really this Herr Naumchik, or not?"

Herr Doktor Grück laid down his knife and fork, his eyes, turning sober behind their rimless glasses. "My dear Neumann," he said slowly, "what does it matter? In either case, the result is just the same—we have, as before, two bipeds. One is male, the other female."

"But if the male was a human being before?"

"Still he is a biped *now*." The good doctor stuffed a bite of liver sausage into his mouth and chewed vigorously. "If I take any credit to myself in this whole affair, gentlemen, and really, allow me to say this in passing, my success has been due to the excellent cooperation of my staff—"

"Too modest," murmured Neumann.

"Not at all!" cried Dr. Grück

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happily. "But if, and I emphasize *if*, I take any credit to myself, it is precisely because I alone perceived this one small fact from the beginning. Who or what our Fritz was, before, is not of the slightest consequence. If we are to believe the Hindus, our Wenzl here might have been a beetle in some previous incarnation."

Here Grück paused to let the laughter subside. "But this makes no difference. Beetle or no, at the present moment he is still Wenzl. Our Wenzl understands this, I am confident. As for our Fritz, he does not understand it as yet. But when he does, trust me, you will see a much healthier and more contented animal."

A gawky young keeper appeared at his elbow, holding out a package. Grück turned in annoyance. "Yes? What is it?"

"Pardon me, Herr Doktor," said the young fellow, blushing and stammering, "but Freda, that is, your honored secretary, asked me to bring this straight up. She said you would want to see it at once."

Grück accepted the parcel with a humorous shrug and a glance around at the company, as if to say, "You see what my life is!" He turned the parcel over once or twice, glancing at the inscriptions.

All at once he gave a start of interest. "By the packet from Xi Bootes Alpha! From Purser Bang! Excuse me, gentlemen, this really may be important." He began to tear open the wrappings impatiently. Inside was a sheaf of papers. Grück examined the first sheet intently.

"Yes, the report of the research team on Brecht's Planet. Now we shall discover something!" He turned a page, then another. "Yes, they have dissected three bipeds, a male and two females. . . ." He fell silent, reading one. After a moment, his jaw dropped in surprise. He glanced up at the curious faces around the table.

"But . . . it says that the males are females, and the females are males!" Grück frowned. "But it's impossible!" he muttered.

"What's that you say?" Neumann demanded. "The females are males, and the males females? That doesn't make sense, Herr Doktor. What, are they hermaphrodites? Then why not say so?"

"No . . . no . . ." answered Grück abstractedly, still reading. "My God, we have all made a serious mistake! Just look here, see what it says!" He held out a page, pointing to one paragraph with a thick, trembling finger.

Neumann took the paper, held it to the light and read slowly, "The inguinal glands, previously thought to be male gonads, have been found to be without connection with the reproductive sys-

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tem, and their function remains unknown. It has been suggested that they are merely organs of display, analogous to the wattles and comb of the terrestrial cock. However, it must again be emphasized that the bearer of these organs is the female, not the male of the species. It is she who carries the young in a placental sac and gives live birth. Impregnation, however, is achieved by an extremely unusual method. The male gametes are carried in the purplish-red frontal organ which appears in developed form only in the adult male. During rut, the female . . .' Good heavens, Grück, just listen to this . . ."

FRITZ and Emma were sitting side by side in the cot in her inner room—Emma tensely, with her hands tightly covering her knob, the biped leaning toward her, an arm around her body, speaking earnestly into her ear.

"You know, Emma, that I didn't mean any harm. You do believe it, don't you?"

"It isn't that," she said in a muffled voice. "It's the way they all treat me—as if I were only an animal. They say I am not human, and so it is correct to keep me in a cage all my life." She looked up. "But what is it to be human? I think, I have feelings, I talk. I even type their letters for them, and still it's not enough." Her slender body shivered. "It's bad enough to hear them talk about me as if I were some creature that couldn't speak or hear. But when *you*—"

"Emma, don't, please," said the biped, overcome by tenderness and remorse. "Of course you're right, you're as human *really* as any of them. What does it matter if you have a different shape? It's the mind inside, the soul that counts, isn't it? Why can't they understand that?"

She looked up again. "Do you really—"

"Of course," said the biped, hugging her closer. Warm, new emotions were coursing through him. "Some day they must all see it, Emma. We'll make them listen, you'll see. There, Emma. It's going to be all right. We're friends now, aren't we?"

She looked up again, timidly. Her body stopped shivering. "Yes, Fritz," she said.

The biped hugged her still closer. Along with the protectiveness he felt, there was a fierce joy, a sense of rightness. For some moments they did not speak.

"Emma?"

"Yes?"

"We're really friends now? You're not afraid of me any more?"

"No, not any more, Fritz."

"Then why keep your hands

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over your knob? Isn't it uncomfortable? Don't you trust me?"

She shook her head. "I don't know why . . . it's just — Of course, I trust *you,* Fritz."

"Well then."

After a moment's hesitation, she dutifully lowered her hands to her lap. Her knob was large, purplish-red, and had a faint spicy scent.

"Now isn't that better? Has anything dreadful happened because you uncovered it?"

"No, Fritz," she said. She laid her muzzle against his shoulder. "I feel so much better now."

"So do I, Emma. Oh, so do I." Bursting with emotion, the biped bent his head closer; and with an instinctive deftness which took them both by surprise, he bit her knob off.

X

THE WORLD vanished, leaving a greenish glow. The young man became aware of his body, cramped into the cushioned seat.

Around him in the great bowl, other figures were stirring.

His buttocks were numb and his head ached. He struggled to his feet. It was hard to become used to the silence, and the smallness of things.

Reeling, dizzy, he came out into the hot afternoon sunlight. He passed the bakery with its gigantic, fragrant stereo-loaf forever swelling over the doorway. Three dark-skinned men in funny little white hats and baggy white trousers came toward him, all talking at once in a foreign language.

A cat ran across the plaza, pursued by something small and green, with many scuttling legs. The sun was hot on the paving stones; heat waves swam in the air.

At the next corner, a crowd had gathered around a little man in green and a gigantic, barrel-chested creature with sparse pinkish feathers, which the little man held by a leash. Coins tinkled in a cup. Prodded by its owner, the huge creature did a clumsy, shuffling dance. Its face was part human, part jelly-fish, moronic and blank. "Thank you, sir, thank you, lady," said the little man, tipping his cap. *Tinkle.* "Thank you, sir."

The young man kept walking. After all, in the cinema one saw bigger monsters than that.

He paused at the newsstand at the end of the plaza, bought the *Berliner Zeitung* and the *Hamburger Tageblatt,* folded the crisp sheets pleasurably under his arm. The next stall was a fruit stand. The young man passed it nearly every day, and sometimes bought bananas or oranges. But today it

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was different. In the middle of the stall was a mound of greenish-yellow ovoids, bigger than pears, with a sign: "Special! Just arrived from Brecht's Planet! Unusual! Try one!" The price was 1 mark 10.

The young man's mouth went dry with excitement. From Brecht's Planet! He fumbled in his pocket. He had just enough.

The bored attendant took his money, handed him one of the greenish fruits. The young man held it carefully as he walked away. It was heavy, warm and waxy to the touch.

A phrase from his lost book came back to him: "Certain greenish fruits, which the bipeds eat with avidity . . ."

Never before had he felt so close to the planet of his birth. It had always been a little unreal to him, something one read about in books. Now, for the first time, he felt that it really existed, that it was made up of real stones and dirt, and had real trees on it bearing real fruit.

Catching sight of Frau Beifelder in the building lobby, her little red eyes watchful and suspicious as always, the young man instinctively slipped the heavy fruit into his pocket, but he kept his hand on it.

"Good afternoon, Frau Beifelder," he said politely, crossing to the elevator. The old woman did not reply but merely narrowed her eyes still further.

The young man stopped the elevator at every floor, as usual, peering curiously at the closed red doors. Julia's door stood ajar, but instead of stopping, he went on up in the elevator, fourth floor, fifth, sixth. He got out, trotted over to the little stair, climbed to the roof.

Berlin lay spread out around him in the hot summer sunlight. The curved threads of the Flugbahnen glittered against the blue. Over there, rising out of a cluster of lower rooftops, bulged the golden dome of the Konzertgebaude.

A cool breeze was blowing steadily across the roof, making the newspapers flap against his arm. The young man gripped them in annoyance, not wanting to relinquish the warm fruit in his hand. A few meters away, a ventilator was turning rapidly under its little black hood. The young man turned his attention to an airplane soaring over the blue-gray horizon. He sniffed the air with interest: Diesel fuel, ozone, hot concrete.

On the parapet a large butterfly or moth was lying feebly moving its blue-and-purple wings. The young man examined it curiously. It did not seem able to fly. When he prodded it with his finger, it merely went on with the

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slow, spasmodic movements of its wings.

Something landed with a faint thud behind him, and he turned to see another butterfly, identical to the first. It lay quivering for a moment, then began the same slow, feeble motions. Suddenly the young man realized that the air was full of them: tiny dark shapes drifting down, landing on the rooftops all around. There were a half a dozen at his feet, then twice as many. One struck him a limp, soft blow on the neck before it dropped to the roof.

Annoyed, the young man turned to leave; but although he picked his way carefully to the stair entrance, he could not avoid crushing several of the brittle bodies under his feet.

HE GOT OFF at the third floor again and opened the door cautiously. Julia kept it unlatched now, usually, because he had had so much trouble with keys. Inside, all was quiet.

Maggie, the cat, strolled up to greet him with a querulous sound. The young man dropped to all fours to touch noses with her. Her nose was wet and cold. She rubbed her face against his, arching her back and twitching her tail.

A moment later there was a sound from the bedroom and Churchill came out, looking dangerous. When he saw it was only the young man, the mad glare left his eyes. He waddled up and sniffed, then caressed the young man's face with his ill-smelling tongue.

The young man got up and wiped his face with a tissue.

"Martin?" came a sleepy voice from the bedroom.

The young man went down the hall and peered in through the doorway. Julia was looking sleepily at him from the bed. "What time is it?"

The young man glanced at his wristwatch. "Nearly three o'clock. Are you feeling better, Julia?"

"Yes, I think so. Would you mind bringing me a drink of water?"

"Not at all, dear Julia." The young man trotted into the kitchen and filled a glass.

He sat on the bed to watch her drink it, feeling rather peculiar. It was the first time he had ever been invited into her bedroom. Once before, he had happened to look in while she was undressing, and had seen her naked breasts, which interested him very much, but made him feel so odd that he had run out of the apartment. Now he could see their round shapes under the thin white nightdress she wore, and out of curiosity he touched one. It was soft and swinging, but had a hard

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protrusion of another color in the middle.

"Oh!" she said, looking startled; her hand went up to grasp his.

"Did I hurt you?"

"No . . . no, it's all right, Martin. Touch them if you like." She set the glass down and taking both his hands, guided them to her breasts.

"Dear Martin," she said. He saw that her eyes were bright with tears.

"Dear Julia." Leaning over, he kissed her. For a first attempt, it was not at all bad; the noses went to one side of each other, which he had always thought would be very difficult.

The woman's breath caught; after a moment her arms went around him, held him tightly. The kiss continued, and after a short time, other interesting things began to happen.

When it was over, the young man lay on his back, exhausted and astonished. Julia was sitting up, brushing her hair and humming quietly to herself.

Suddenly the door-light flashed. They looked at each other. "Oh, dear, who can that be?"

"I'll go and see."

"Darling!" said the woman, holding out her hand to stop him, half weeping, half laughing: "First put your clothes back on."

"Oh." The young man kissed her again, because she looked so rosy and contented, then got dressed. The door-light flashed repeatedly. "All right, I'm coming, I'm coming," he muttered.

In the hall stood a medium-sized man in a gray summer surcoat, puffing a cigar. "Well, Naumchik?" he said smiling.

"Yes?" asked the young man uncertainly.

"Don't you know me? Tassen, of the *Freie Presse* — remember?"

"No. Herr Tassen? What do you want?"

"I was passing by," said Tassen, looking him over with shrewd, friendly eyes. "So this is where you're holed up? Mind if I come in a moment?"

"Well — I suppose not." The young man backed away uncertainly, and Tassen followed him, looking around the apartment with interest.

THERE WAS a bellow from the bedroom, then the sound of claws scratching frantically against the closed door, followed by Julia's muffled voice: "Churchill, stop it! Bad dog!"

Tassen cocked an eyebrow toward the sounds but made no comment. "Well, this is a cozy place, Naumchik. I won't keep you a moment. You won't mind if I sit down, I suppose?"

"Please."

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"Seen anything of Zellini lately?"

"Please?"

Tassen frowned, tapped his cigar into an ashtray. "Have you been back to Paris at all — since the — ?" He raised his eyebrows again.

"To Paris?" asked the young man, confused. "No."

"I suppose you know they've tied a rocket to you?"

"Pardon?"

"Discharged you — given you the sack."

"Oh. No, I didn't know it."

Tassen drew on his cigar, staring at the young man. After a moment he asked, "Just what happened to you, anyhow, Naumchik? One moment, as far as I understand, you were a perfectly regular young newspaperman — then that biped business, and next, you were swinging from the ceilings in Elektra. I gather you're all right now."

"Oh, yes, perfectly."

"Well?"

"Well?"

Tassen looked baffled and faintly annoyed. "Of course, if you don't want to discuss it with me —"

"But I don't remember."

"Oh?" Tassen blinked. "What don't you remember?"

"Anything — before Elektra."

"I see. So that's it. Then you're not likely to tell me what you were up to with that biped, are you?"

"No."

"I see that. Well, anyhow, Naumchik, it's good to know you're on your feet again. I take it you haven't been doing any journalistic work lately?"

"No."

"Want to do any?"

"I hadn't thought about it," the young man said.

"Not too easy for you to get a job on any of the Berlin papers, after that stunt, probably," said Tassen. "But you might get some free-lance work. Do a feature on your experiences in Elektra — why not?" He stood up, took a card from his surcoat pocket. "Here's my address. If I can be any help —"

With a cheerful wave, he was gone.

On the following day, the young man remembered the fruit from Brecht's Planet, and decided to open it before it should spoil. The greenish-yellow rind was quite thin; inside was a rather sickly-looking yellow pulp. Julia ate a slice and pronounced it interesting. The young man, however, took one bite and immediately spat it out: the pulp was soft and unpleasant, with a distinct rancid flavor. The disappointment was so acute that he mourned for days.

The good weather lasted until

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October; then it turned blustery and cold, with snow and occasional flurries of sleet. On an evening in late November, the young man entered the bar of the Correspondents' Club. He stood for a moment, shaking melted snow from his hat. The long mahogany bar was half deserted; the hooded bar lights were reflected in the mirrors, and the little green telephone lights glowed down the bar.

Emile, the bartender, a red-faced Saxon, raised an eyebrow in greeting as the young man approached.

"Good evening, Herr Naumchik. We haven't seen you in some time."

"No, I've been in Westphalia, Emile. Give me a double Long John."

"Yes, sir." Emile reached behind him for the bottle, poured a glass brimming full. He leaned nearer to remark, "There was a call for you earlier, Herr Naumchik. A lady."

"Oh? Did she give her name?"

"No, sir. If she calls again, shall I say you are here?"

The young man reflected. "Might as well. I wonder who it is, Nina? Olga? What sort of a looking woman was she, Emile?" he asked, but the stout bartender had already moved away and was cupping an ear toward another customer.

"Hello, Naumchik, when did you get in?" A tall man wearing tweeds and a Tyrolean hat edged in beside him at the bar. He spoke in a thick English accent. By a short leash he held a slim, silkenhaired greyhound with great mournful eyes. The dog nudged his cold nose into the young man's palm.

"Oh, hello, Potter." The young man slapped absently at the dog's muzzle. "Just this morning. Down, Bruno. Should have been two o'clock last night, but we were stacked up five hours over Templehof."

"Terrible weather," said Potter. "Anything to that regeneration story?"

"No, it was a frost, but I got a couple of columns out of it anyway. You look all right. I heard you'd broken your arm at Riga."

"No, that was Merle," said the man, motioning with his chin to a corner table, where a blonde young woman sat with one arm in a sling. She lifted her glass and smiled.

"Oh, too bad," said the young man, returning the gesture.

"It's all right. Makes her more manageable. Sometimes I wish they'd all break their arms, or legs, or something."

A perspiring young man in black came by and clutched the Englishman's arm. "Look here,

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Potter, do you know where I can find Johnny Ybarra?"

"No, no idea — have you tried the brothels?"

"All of them?" asked the sweating man despairingly over his shoulder as he hurried out. "Hello, Naumchik," he added just before he disappeared.

Emile, who had been speaking into the hooded telephone at the end of the bar, looked up and raised his eyebrows. The young man nodded. Emile pressed a key, and the handset in front of the young man lighted up.

"Excuse me, Donald. Hello — oh, it's you, Julia!"

The tiny face in the screen looked up at him with a smile. "How lucky to catch you, Martin! I called just on the chance of finding — Can you come for dinner?"

"Let me think. Yes — no, confound it, I've got to have dinner with Schenk. I'm sorry, Julia, I forgot."

"It's a pity. I'd love to see you, Martin." She looked up at him wistfully.

"So would I. Maybe I could meet you somewhere tomorrow for cocktails . . ." The young man reflected that although Julia was a bit old for him, and he had no intention of starting that up all over again, still there was no getting around the fact that he had many pleasant memories of that little flat on the Heinrichstrasse, where he had written his first story on Julia's little portable — *I Was Elektra's Climbing Enigma,* by Martin Naumchik. How proud they had both been when they saw it printed in the paper! Everything since had stemmed from that . . . "How is Churchill?"

"I had to give him away, Martin. He was becoming so surly; he bit a good friend of mine."

"Too bad. But you still have Maggie?"

"Yes, Maggie is fine."

Down the bar, three men in plastic surcoats were tossing coins into a metal tub which stood before a stereo of a plump young woman in Bavarian peasant costume. Each time a coin fell into the tub, the girl turned slowly around and lifted her skirts, displaying her bare bottom; each time this happened, the three men burst into roars of coarse laughter.

Potter touched him on the shoulder and mouthed, "Good-by;" the young man turned, waved.

"Well, Martin, do call me if you can."

"Yes, I'll do that. Tomorrow, sometime in the afternoon. You're still at the Ministry?"

"Still there."

"Fine, I'll call you. Good-by."

The pathetic face in the telephone screen winked out. Sigh-

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ing with regret and relief, the young man replaced the handset.

A PLUMP young man in a brown jacket took Potter's place at the bar. He had a bristly, unkempt mustache and protruding blue eyes, and somehow managed to look both innocent and dissolute.

"Hello, Naumchik."

"Hello, Wallenstein."

The plump man signaled to the bartender. "Emile, a Black Wednesday. Listen, Naumchik, you may be just the man I want. You know Kohler, the fellow who runs that string of provincial weeklies?"

"Yes, what about him?"

"Well, it's ridiculous, — I owe the man a favor — I promised I'd cover that Zoo story for him tomorrow. Then what should happen, but UPI offers me a plush assignment in Oslo. Two months, all expenses, best hotels. Well, I mean to say! But I've got to leave in the morning or it's no go. You wouldn't mind, would you, Naumchik — take you just half an hour — I'd even throw in a bit out of my own pocket."

"Hold on a minute, I've lost you. What Zoo story?"

"Oh, one of their bipeds has given birth, and Kohler wants to play it up for the farm audience. What do you say?"

"Well, I suppose there's no reason —" the young man began, then suddenly stopped. What a curious sensation! Out of the depths of his memory floated the picture of a two-legged creature scrabbling against the glass wall of a cage, while he, outside in the cold air, looked with amazement at his pink, five-fingered hands. How odd. It was the first time in months he had even thought of it.

"Well? It's agreed?"

"No, on second thought, I don't believe it would be advisable," said the young man.

"Not advisable? What do you mean? Come on, old fellow, I'll put in ten of my own on top of Kohler's twenty — now how's that?"

Naumchik drained his glass quickly, set it down. "No, I'm sorry," he said. "I've just remembered, I've got to be somewhere else tomorrow." He clapped the plump young man on the back. "Well, you'll find someone, I'm sure. So long, Wallenstein.

The plump man pouted at him. "Well, then, if you want to be a bastard."

"I do," said Martin Naumchik cheerfully. "Aren't we all? Keep it clean, old man." He walked out, whistling. On the threshold he paused to breathe deep. The snow had stopped. The stars were crystal bright over the rooftops.

— DAMON KNIGHT

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THE LONELY

His colony was doomed, yet the people were unafraid. He could not understand—and never would!

I

THE WIND swept down from the hills and passed across the field. The white foliage rippled and swirled. Nathaniel Beverage stood waist deep in the midst of the gleaming, pointed leaves and watched the ebb and flow of the plant-waves. The setting sun was at his back, but the white leaves were blinding even through the dark green filter he wore. Round spots, slick and shiny, dotted the dead whiteness of the leaves. Whenever the sun caught one just right it flashed with the brightness of a speck of hellfire. Beverage squinted against the dancing spots of brilliance. He grunted. Soon the shiny spots on each leaf would grow and fuse together to cover the entire leaf, and it would be time for the harvest.

He turned and looked into the sun. Far down the valley, as far as the eye could see, stretched the shimmering whiteness, reaching between the hills like a restless glacier. In the middle distance the whiteness took on a bluish cast from the ozone, and Beverage gauged its itensity with a practiced eye. He grunted again. The ozone was high, despite the wind. Must be six-seven hundred parts per million over the fields. The plants were ripening fast; harvest would be sooner than anyone had expected.

He felt a rasping at the base of his throat, and instinctively he squeezed his mask. It was dry. He knew he ought not to be here in the croplands without a field mask. Some ozone was getting through.

He turned and began to walk the half mile across the field, moving slowly, not breathing deeply. The irritation in his mind began to match the irritation in his throat. Tomorrow the rocket

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MAN

By THEODORE L. THOMAS

Illustrated by JACKSON

from Earth was due, and Radmuck would be on it. Beverage felt again the sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach as he thought of Radmuck. Why was the man coming? Did he know something?

He tried to turn his mind to more pleasant things, but he couldn't think of them. He knew how it would be when he got back to the Crushing Plant and told them that the harvest in this field would be sooner than expected. They would ask how he knew, and he would have to explain. Everywhere it was the same, back on Earth and here on Iros. A man could not merely do the right thing or say the right thing, he also had to explain it. People insisted on talking so much.

Beverage was a man whose tongue could never keep up with his mind, and so he said what had to be said, and did not try to say any more. He knew that he was disliked for his reticence.

BEVERAGE reached the edge of the field and climbed the gentle slope. At the door of the Crushing Plant he turned to look over the field. The ozone concentration where he stood was down to a normal 400 parts per million. He looked out over the gray and white landscape. Toward his left, along the forward slope of the hill, stretched a long row of processing domes, ending in the great Conveyor Dome from which the conveyor belt snaked up and over the crest of the hill toward the next valley where the landing field was. To his right stood the storage sheds flanked by row upon row of the huge harvesters. Beverage took a deep breath, and felt better. This was his doing, all this, and he was content. He had done the right thing in bringing all this about and neither Radmuck nor anyone else could change that.

With a last proud look around Beverage turned and went through the outer door. Stepping up to the inner door he leaned against it to overcome the slight positive pressure inside the dome. The door suddenly gave way and he quickly walked through the outrushing current of air and allowed the door to slam shut behind him. He glanced at

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the big crusher rolls looming over him, and saw what was about to happen. The words formed in his mind, but he was unable to call out. So he stood, helplessly, and watched.

Perched up on top of the highest roll, twenty feet from the floor, sat Hal Close, carefully repairing a crack in the roll. Frank Jepp crouched behind the control board, reaching around from behind it, constantly glancing up at Close to assure himself that he wasn't seen. Just as Beverage entered, Jepp got the safety latch off, leaped around in front of the board and, with a shout of "Watch yourself, Hal," spun the rheostat that started the rolls.

Close, up on the top roll, barely had time to jump to his feet as the great rolls started to turn under him.

He began to run to maintain his position. The rolls revolved faster. A high-pitched yell — a residue of Close's Virginia upbringing—burst from his throat and he began that mad ride down the top rolls that Beverage had heard about but never seen. Flat on his stomach now, Close swiftly flowed down the top of the huge crusher, bridging the gaps between the rolls with his outstretched hands, and now and then repeating that piercing rebel yell. A hundred yards down the machine, just beyond the last roll, was a transverse supporting bar. Close launched himself at it, dangled for a moment, dropped to the belt beneath him, and rolled off onto his feet on the floor. He ambled back to the head of the crusher and said to Jepp, "Well, now, that was right neighborly of you to give me a lift off."

Jepp grinned up at Close. "Man, I never saw you move so fast in your life. You're coming along, boy. You're coming along. How about it, Doc?" This last to Beverage. "Think the squirt here is growing up?"

The "squirt" stood six feet five in his stocking feet and was made out of whipcord and whalebone. Close happened to be the youngest man in the colony—a bare twenty-two, twenty years younger than Beverage—and the others never let him forget it.

Close said, "Squirt, huh?" And he snapped out an open hand in a straight-arm lunge that caught Jepp on the shoulder. Jepp tumbled backwards to the floor. He slid to a halt and, from a position flat on his back, snapped out with both legs and landed lightly on his feet. He whirled, poised to leap at Close, a broad grin on his face.

BEVERAGE had been trying to utter the words to call a halt to all this, but things had been

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happening too fast; he was not the kind of man who could yell. Even now, with the immediate prospect of a rough-and-tumble mock fight confronting him, he was unable to frame the words that would stop it. Instead he stepped between the two men and raised a hand, palm outward, toward each. Close and Jepp laughed, joyous laughs ringing with physical exuberance. They came down from the balls of their feet and walked over to Beverage. Close clapped him on the back with what was meant to be a light-hearted pat, but it almost knocked him down.

Close said, "Okay, Doc. I'll fix him later. Everything under control?"

Beverage had been trying to enunciate a protest against Close's blow, but the question reminded him why he had come in here in the first place. "Oh, yes," he said in his slow way. "Number two field is ripening ahead of schedule." He paused. "It ought to be ripe in a day or two. The crusher here—"

He waved at the towering machine. Before he could finish the sentence, Jepp broke in. "Ripe in a day or two, huh? What do you know. How'd you figure that, Doc?"

Beverage was annoyed. He considered whether to finish his sentence or to reply to Jepp's question. At the same time another part of his mind raced on ahead, ticking off all the things that had to be done to insure a proper and speedy harvest. A myriad of details had to be watched over. The precipitation unit needed checking. There was premature precipitation. Probably inadvertent seeding; probably that lowest elbow in the feed line had collected a tiny nest of crystals, got to flush it out. Then there was. . . .

"Aw, Doc can tell just by looking at it." It was Close. "That's how you do it, isn't it, Doc? Just by looking at it?"

Beverage shook his head. "No. No, I can tell from the ozone concentration in the air above the fields. It is quite a bit higher than normal." He prepared to explain that the normal blue cast to the atmosphere of Iros became even deeper as the photosynthetic process reached a maximum and the release of ozone by the plants increased, particularly in the vicinity of the fields. But even as his tongue began to form the words, Beverage knew he would never be able to make it. This inability to talk swiftly was what separated him from the others. These people seldom remained silent long enough to listen; they must always be talking or doing something violent. None had the patience to

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listen to a man whose speech was careful and methodical. He was apart.

Close was talking, as Beverage knew he would. "Well, that's looking at it, or smelling it. Same thing really. That's 'bout the only way a man can tell."

"Sure," said Jepp. He glanced at the mask at Beverage's belt. "He wasn't wearing a field mask out in the field. That's how he smelled it, right through the mask."

There it was, and Beverage felt the familiar sense of frustration build up. They had caught him, again, not obeying the rules. They might not be particularly well-trained technically, but they certainly were quick witted. Young, strong, keen people in the odd atmosphere of Iros, and they seemed to grow younger, stronger and keener. There was a biological problem here that merited study some day. Possibly the breathing of so much ozone in lieu of oxygen. . . .

Close said, "Well, we don't worry none about Doc. He knows what he's doing. He wants to wear a general mask out in the fields, he wears it. Nobody's to tell him no."

"Oh, sure," said Jepp. "He knows what he's doing." And the two young men stood nodding at each other.

Beverage finally finished his sentence. "The crusher here ought to be ready to go by tomorrow morning."

"Don't worry about a thing, Doc. It will be. Just so this midget here—" Close nodded at the six-foot Jepp — "doesn't try to run me through the rolls every five minutes. I'll get right back on it." He turned to leave, but then turned back and said, "Say, Doc. I almost forgot. They want you over at Extraction Number 3 dome. They got some kind of a meeting going on over there."

Beverage said, "What is the meeting for?"

"Doctor Radmuck called ahead and wants to talk to the whole colony as soon as he lands tomorrow. Everybody's wondering what's up."

Beverage considered what might happen at the meeting, knowing that he could no nothing to stop any uproar. A wise man knows his own limitations, and Beverage was a wise man. In a rousing shouting-type argument he could never get a point across, never persuade. Slowly he turned to go to the meeting, wondering what he should do after he got there.

II

BEVERAGE suddenly turned aside from the path traversing the side of the hill, and headed

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for the crest. He felt the need for refreshment of the spirit, and he knew he could find it at the crest.

On the crest he looked down into the next valley at the flat and packed gray soil of the landing field. Tomorrow there would be another glossy fused patch to join the others that marred the even gray surface. Beverage hoped it would not be the last. From that field had gone hundreds of shipments of the anti-cholesterol moiety. The drug fraction went back to Earth to be fed into the maws of the chemical reactors. Out of the reactors came the newest and best of the anti-cholesterol drugs, enough for the requisite one gram a month for every person on Earth over the age of twenty-five years. With it, the veins and arteries remained open and supple, free of the rigid deposits that had stiffened the vessel walls and throttled the vessel openings. The blood pulsed unimpeded to the brain and the muscles and the organs, easily supplying the four corners of the body with the stuff of tissues. To what end? Beverage shook his head.

To the end that man might live longer. A man lived strong and fruitful for an average of 300 years. But all mortal things must die. There came a time in this extended existence when the human fat became so depleted that it could no longer serve as a storehouse for the anti-cholesterol drug. The guardian concentration in the bloodstream disappeared suddenly. The organs continued their unheeding production of cholesterol. Quickly the body became clotted and glutted with crystals of cholesterol, and it was over. So accurately predictable was the time of death that one could neatly arrange for a last round of farewell parties, parties at which the man of 25 and the man of 300 were physically indistinguishable, save, perhaps, for the air of detachment and reserve on the part of the older man.

Beverage turned away from the landing field and stared out over the far-flung array of low-lying rounded hills. Everywhere the gray soil was dotted with grayish-white patches of natural vegetation. The setting sun was perched squarely on the horizon, yet the land was darker than one would expect. No sharp shadows appeared anywhere and there was none of the usual orange colors that went with sunset on Earth. The sight was stimulating to Beverage, and the familiar exultant feeling welled through him. In one movement he swept the mask from his face and shook his head to free it from the feeling of the straps. This was where men belonged, out on alien soil

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seeking new ways to adapt and change and expand throughout the Universe, not sitting on the home planet and breeding into stultification.

Beverage felt the sting in his eyes and the bite in his nose and throat. He breathed shallowly to prevent the ozone from penetrating deep into his lungs. Often he had moments of doubt about how he had brought this about but when he stood here like this the doubt washed away. This was his doing, this colony. Men could live here and make their existence worth while, even enjoy it. And all because of the early work of the young chemist, Nathaniel Beverage.

"I think you better try to hire him, even if he did just get out of school. Look here. His doctoral dissertation is entitled, *Duplication of the Photosynthetic Process in toto.* Make him an offer, anyway. His name is Nathaniel Beverage."

"This fellow Beverage has certainly come up with some new ideas in three months time. Give him a couple of assistants so he can chase them down."

"I don't care if he has only been on the project for six months. He's done more with those Iros specimens than anyone else around here in two years. Give him the title, too: manager of the Extraterrestrial Compound Division."

"Come in, Doctor Radmuck. I have good news for you. You are being promoted to the Board of Directors of the National Space Survival Institute, effective immediately. I'm sure you will . . . What? Oh, the new project director here will be Doctor Beverage. Yes, I know he's young. Yes, I know he's only been on Project Longevity for a year and a half. Yes, I know he has trouble making speeches. Yes, but . . . just look at how much he has accomplished."

". . . and so we meet here in Stockholm on an exceedingly special occasion. For the first time since the institution of the Prizes, the awards for chemistry and for physiology and medicine are being given simultaneously to the same man. The human race need never again fear the effects of the anti-cholestrial drugs, thanks to Doctor Nathaniel Beverage. So it is with grateful hearts that we . . ."

"I hate to see you do it, Nathaniel. I can't help feeling that we need you here on Earth. But on the other hand, you are right when you say that we can put

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the anti-cholesterol drug out sooner if you are with the new colony. Another thing, I am certain that I will have an easier job of persuading the United Nations to put up all that money if you are going to be in charge of the technology at the Iros colony. So I guess you're right; as long as we have to grow that fraction of the drug on Iros, we need you there. Bless you, and let me wish you . . ."

BEVERAGE walked along the crest of the hill, picking his footing carefully among the tough white shrubs that grew wild there. He walked beneath the giant solar mirror, and he paused to watch it as it extracted the last waning fragments of heat from the setting sun. The glow of the boiler faded as he watched. His feet moved slower and slower as he drew closer to Extraction Number 3 dome, and he reluctantly went through the outer door. Inside the pressure lock he stripped off his mask and stood motionless listening to the rumble of loud voices coming through the inner door. It was easy to tell that the discussion had already started; in fact it was in full swing. Briefly he considered replacing his mask and returning to his quarters, but he knew from experience that that was no solution; they would simply transfer the discussion to his quarters, and then he would never get them out. With a sigh that was too deep for the ozone-rich air—it burned his throat—he leaned his weight against the inner door and forced it open.

The rumble of voices turned into a roar, but then all were suddenly silent as one voice called out, "Hey, here's Doc. Ask him. Go on, just ask him."

Two figures detached themselves from the edge of the crowd and swung to Beverage's side. Gently but swiftly they hustled him into the center of the surging group, and one of them said, "You tell us, Doc. What's Radmuck got on his mind?"

Beverage was amazed at their acuity. Not only did they sense that something was very wrong, but they came to *him* for an explanation. They had hit on the one person who could tell them of the probable disaster that would follow Radmuck's visit. But as long as there was any chance at all that Radmuck might be coming on an innocuous matter, Beverage had to keep silent.

The man said again, "What's it all about, Doc?"

Beverage said, "I don't know. I don't know."

The man shrugged and turned away. "Well, if you're not worried, don't see why we should be. Guess there's no use getting all

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stewed up about nothing. Let's go back to work." He walked off.

Beverage wondered if he should say something to prepare them for what might happen. But he didn't know what was best, and they were all walking away.

A voice said beside him, "Are you sure there isn't something you should tell us, Nathaniel?"

Beverage turned and saw Ursula Doddard. He started to say hello to her but he felt his face flush, and the words choked him. Then he realized she had asked a question. He shook his head.

She said, "I see. Well, I hope everything is all right." She shook her head, tilting it back as she did so.

She wore her hair long, unlike most of the other girls in the colony. It was a glowing brown, and as she shook her hair the red highlights in its flashed and gleamed in the light from the overhead bulb. Beverage was interested in the flashing effect. He had noted it before. He wondered what caused it. Possibly the natural hair oils tended to concentrate at a region a certain length from the follicle, resulting in areas of excess oil which naturally reflected. . . .

"Are you going to do anything to get ready for tomorrow?" asked Ursula Doddard.

"What? Oh, yes." Suly Doddard was at it again. Always seemed to be suggesting things for him to do. She was a pretty girl, round where the others were lean, and she did not walk as much like a man. Beverage liked to be near her, except that she always seemed to suggest things for him to do. As if he did not know what had to be done. Furthermore, he always felt a little uncomfortable in her presence, except that now and then when she was quiet she seemed to understand that he wanted to think, and he was content. Now, though, he felt irritated; she was picking at him again.

URSULA DODDARD raised her arm and smoothed the hair at the back of her neck. The sleeves of her coverall were pushed up above the elbow. Her bare right forearm glowed in the light, and on the underside of her forearm Beverage could see a quarter-inch brown wart. Instantly all his irritation vanished. One little blemish perched on an otherwise perfect and completely feminine forearm, and Beverage unaccountably felt his heart warm to her. Because of that minor imperfection he felt that he was on equal footing with her. He need not be concerned with his own shortcomings; after all, she too was marred. He felt expansive and completely at ease.

"Suly," he said. "I don't know

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what will happen tomorrow, but whatever it is, we can't let it have any effect on the colony. This is a good life and we don't want to ruin it. Men belong on planets like this. Earth is beginning to stagnate. I'm convinced that the future of men lies in colonies like this one. If we continue to send the anti-cholesterol drug back to Earth we will be. . . . By the way. The Main Valley will be ready to harvest in a day or two. It's running a good week ahead of schedule. Can't understand it, either, unless that new fertilizer I tried had something to do with it. Maybe that was a good idea at that. Used metal filings, you see, with sodium chloride. Small scale tests indicated that the ozone would form an active oxide which would react with sodium chloride and form a soluble metallic chloride. Then the sodium would keep the soil alkaline. By golly, that must be it." And Beverage plopped his right fist into his right hand, nodding, smiling. Gradually, he became conscious of the fact that Ursula was watching him, wide-eyed. He dropped his hands to his side and looked at her, and flushed.

She said softly, "I love it when you talk like that, Nathaniel. Tell me some more about it, please."

Beverage smiled and got ready to speak again. But then he remembered something. Ursula Doddard was a mechanic. She maintained the pumps used for the heated alkaline water sprays that removed the ozone from the domes. She was not a chemist. She could not understand what he was talking about. The realization threw him into confusion. He began to back away, saying as he went, "I've, uh, got to go. I, uh. . . . Good-by." He turned and ran out the lock. He was twenty yards out into the atmosphere before the bite in his eyes and throat reminded him to put on his mask.

Beverage stood still while he waited for the smarting in his eyes to go away. It was dark, and the landscape appeared ghostly in the dim starlight. The plant-filled valley below him looked more than ever like a rippling river of snow. Overhead the stars gleamed faintly against the black sky, waxing and waning in a period of twinkling appreciably greater than that seen from Earth. The gentle slope on which Beverage stood was a looming blackness broken with vague patches of gray where the white stands of vegetation grew. Higher on the slopes were the glowing domes, looking like taut bubbles about to burst and spew their contents into the atmosphere. Beverage felt at ease as he looked at them. He looked his

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fill, then he went up to his own dome to bed.

DAWN came brisk and blue, and Beverage was soon up and out in it. At the Mess dome the talk was all about the early harvest in the main field and the ship arrival. People kept asking Beverage about the early harvest. He found himself constantly answering hosts of trivial questions: What made the field ripen so fast, Doc? How can you tell just by looking at it, Doc? Will it be a good crop, Doc? How do you know?

Things began to happen fast after breakfast. The harvesting crews moved down into the main field with the great combines. Other crews moved to the landing field and began the job of bringing down the incoming ship. Beverage joined the later groups, and watched the ship come down.

Bringing the ship in was a tricky operation on Iros. The technique called for the bare minimum of operational time for the braking jets, for the high ozone content of the atmosphere chewed away at the ceramic lining of the jet exhausts. The trick was to get the ship on the ground before the liners were consumed, otherwise the exposed metal quickly took fire and burned out. Every space ship required a new set of liners after every landing and take-off in the Irosian atmosphere.

The ship put down safely. Radmuck was the first one out. He was a thin man with a little mustache, and he walked with his head thrust out in front of him. His eyes darted over the waiting people and he quickly spotted Beverage. He walked to him immediately and held out his hand and said loudly, "Well, Nathaniel, how have you been? Are you waiting anxiously to see what I have to tell you?" Radmuck deliberately asked two questions in the same breath. He knew Beverage well.

Beverage considered which question to answer. He began to form the words regarding his health, but changed his mind when he realized that Radmuck did not really care. He then said, "No, I . . ." But Radmuck had turned away and was talking with Sanchez standing nearby. He heard Radmuck ask about the meeting, and he heard Sanchez explain that it had been called for right after lunch. Beverage shook hands with Captain Pike as he came off the ship, and then walked away to do the things that had to be done.

The next few hours went by swiftly for Beverage. The early-ripening plants retained their juices more tenaciously than had the normal plants. As a result the

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crusher was not obtaining its normal yield of juice, and the residues were wetter than usual. Beverage solved the dilemma by adding 5 per cent of the butyronitrile solvent at the crusher instead of holding it all back for the extractor. The solvent-treated residues then went into the butyronitrile extraction units already wet with the solvent, and this increased extraction efficiency.

Beverage was checking out the operation of the great extraction units when someone tapped him on the shoulder and told him it was time to go to the meeting.

THE DOME was crowded when he entered and everybody was talking at once. Ursula Doddard pushed her way to his side and sat down.

Hal Close burst in through the door behind Beverage, stood with his head thrown back, and emitted a piercing rebel yell. It was so loud inside the dome that it hurt Beverage's ears. Others responded to it with weaker imitations, some clapped hands, others laughed. Beverage felt sick, unable to respond to the holiday feeling generated by the gathering of the colony. The sick feeling became worse for Beverage as he realized his own incompetence and inability to deal with the developing situation.

Ursula Doddard saw his face. She put a hand on his arm and asked, "What is the matter, Nathaniel? Are you all right?"

Beverage nodded, not able to form words.

Sanchez walked into the mess dome followed by Radmuck. Sanchez looked solemn. He walked to the center of the dome and stood motionless, obviously waiting for silence. The rumble of conversation in the dome cut off suddenly at the unusual conduct; Sanchez normally would have roared for silence, but he did not do so now.

In the dead quiet Sanchez said, "Doctor Radmuck has something to say to us. I suggest you listen closely." Radmuck wasted no words.

"We know just how to synthesize the anti-cholesterol fraction now. Earth doesn't need Iros any more. There won't be any more shipments from here; they'll make it on Earth." He looked around and smiled.

The silence continued for a moment, and then after looking at each other, the seated people broke into a low buzz of conversation. Radmuck's eyes sought and found Beverage, and for a moment they stared at each other. It was Henry Jansen who raised his voice and asked the question: "Who was the bright boy that found out how to make

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it? Where's he been all these years?"

Beverage picked up his coffee cup and drained it; he knew what was coming next. Radmuck stared at Beverage a moment longer and then said, still in that low voice. "The process for making the fraction has been known for a long time, only it was kept a secret."

"What?" It was Sanchez. "You mean that somebody knew how to make the stuff all along, yet they let us come out here and set up a whole colony to grow it?"

"Yes. Seems somebody left an envelope with the Boston Trust Company. On it was written 'To be opened in the event that the anti-cholesterol drug raised on the planet Iros becomes unavailable to Earth', or something like that. Inside was the complete description of how to synthesize the fraction. It was opened accidentally. It took a while to prove. But it's done now, and they don't need Iros any more."

"Who was it?"

Now that the time had come Beverage felt no sensation whatsoever. He was startled to find that his mind was clear and calm; there was none of the emotional upheaval he had expected. He could even be interested in what the response of his friends was going to be.

Radmuck said, "Nathaniel Beverage," and there was no longer anything to be concerned about.

BEVERAGE sat toying with his empty coffee cup. The silence, which had been heavy before, now became overpowering. There was no need for Beverage to look up; he felt all eyes on him as if he sat under the heat of a thousand spotlights. Although he felt no inner turmoil, he was disturbed by what he was convinced was the cold chill of hostility that filled the room.

Radmuck went out the door. The dome stayed quiet.

"Would you like some more coffee, Nathaniel?" said Ursula.

"No, thank you."

"I'll just get you some anyway. It'll be good for you." She went into the back, threading her way among the silent people, and soon she returned with a cup of steaming black coffee. "Now sip this, and you'll feel better."

Beverage nodded and touched the scalding fluid to his lips. He put the cup down and said quietly, "Thank you, Suly. Thank you for behaving as if nothing has happened.

"Why, there's nothing to thank me for, Nathaniel. I thought you might want some one to talk to while you think about what you have to do to keep the colony going."

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Beverage stared at her. "Keep the colony going? Me?"

"Certainly. You'll think of something. Now drink your coffee."

Beverage did as he was told; the coffee scalded all the way down, and he choked on the heat of it. Ursula watched him, and he found that he was annoyed at her seeing him in such undignified straits. His face must have reflected his annoyance because she suddenly got up and said, "Well, you think about it, Nathaniel. I'll stop over and see you later."

Beverage watched her walk out, feeling alone among all the others, wishing that he could call out and ask her to stay. She turned at the door to wave at him, and the simple gesture unaccountably made him feel warm and good. He waved back and watched her trim figure tighten as she tugged at the inner door. She flashed a smile just before the door slammed shut, and Beverage leaned back feeling at peace with the world. He sat wrapped in himself, estranged from his companions of many years, yet he felt pleased and at ease.

Keep the colony going, she had said. Well, now, there was a problem. The only solution, obviously, was to find something that would keep the Earth ships coming to Iros, at least until the colony became self sufficient . . . Wups. How about that ozonized alloy? He had not thought about that in a couple of years, but it might be . . .

He got up and walked past the quiet people and went straight to his laboratory and rummaged through his sample storage cabinets. He found a one foot square sheet of a thin metallic substance. He tucked it under one arm, and took the long walk to the space ship. He went up to the watch officer, handed him the sheet, and said, "Give this to Captain Pike. Tell him to test it, tensile strength, elongation, flexibility, abrasive resistance, everything. Give it the works. Understand?"

The officer nodded. Beverage returned to his laboratory and began thumbing through his notebooks. He began to grow sleepy, so he stretched out on the cot and fell sound asleep. He slept all night, waking just before dawn. He continued working his way through the notebooks. He had not finished when Ursula came in.

"LET'S GO have some breakfast, Nathaniel," she said. "This will be a big day, and you must have something to eat."

He nodded absently. "Yes, by all means."

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She half led him out of the dome. He put on his mask automatically and trudged to the Mess dome like one asleep. He and Ursula sat at a table, and it took only a moment for him to realize that no one greeted him. The coldness hurt Beverage. Plaintively he looked around, but none would meet his eyes. The quietness distressed him now; he realized with surprise that he missed the usual hullaballoo that accompanied everything his friends did.

He noticed Close and Jepp sitting side by side at the table across from him. He couldn't be certain, but it seemed as if Close were guardedly watching him while seeming not to. He nodded and smiled at Close, but Close took no notice. Dejectedly Beverage turned to the food Ursula had placed in front of him and began to eat. It was tasteless in his mouth.

Halfway through the meal Captain Pike burst in and stood just inside the door and looked around the room. He saw Beverage and swooped toward him. "Nathaniel! Where did you get this?" He dropped in front of Beverage the remnants of the metallic sheet that Beverage had delivered to the watch officer. It was smaller; strips had been sawed from it and holes had been punched in it.

Beverage looked up. "I made it."

"You made . . . How?"

"Put a silicon dioxide wash on a nickel steel, heated it to incandescence and air-quenched it."

The captain stared at him. "Can you do it again?"

"Certainly."

"Do you know what you've got here?"

Beverage permitted himself a smile. "Yes, I do."

"Do you? Just listen to this." The captain pulled a sheet of paper out of a pocket and read, "Tensile strength at room temperature, 486,000 pounds per square inch; at 1,000 degrees C. it's 450,000 pounds per square inch. The stuff has a Young's modulus at 1,000 degrees C. of just about *one billion.* The modulus of rigidity is three-quarters of a billion. We gave it a Charpy impact test and broke the hammer. The elastic ratio is one. Elongation at yield is 100 per cent. Good heavens, man, what *is* this stuff?"

Beverage said, "It's a new alloy."

The captain stared at him. Behind him Beverage was vaguely aware that Close had expelled his breath and said in a booming whisper to Jepp, "Great day in the morning, he's done it already. Pay me." And Jepp rammed an elbow into Close's ribs.

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The captain said, "Can you make a lot of this?"

"I don't know why not. Any structural nickel steel having a yield point of about 50,000 pounds per square inch will do for a starting material. We've got lots of sand here, and lots of atmosphere. The solar mirror ought to supply plenty of heat. That's all we need."

Sanchez appeared at the captain's side and said, "This something you think they can use on Earth, Harry?"

"My god, yes! There's nothing like this on Earth. The technical boys will go wild. Only . . ." he turned to Beverage, "Why can't they make this on Earth if you tell them how? Or have you already told them?"

Beverage considered which question he should answer first. "No, I haven't told them." He stopped to formulate his thoughts on the next question.

The captain said, "But the steps you outlined are simple; they can carry them out on Earth too."

Ursula said, "Will you be quiet and let him talk?"

The captain's mouth fell open. Beverage took no notice of the exchange. He said, "You forget there is a difference between the air of Earth and the air of Iros."

The captain's mouth stayed open. "Ozone," he said.

Beverage nodded. "Yes, ozone, When we heat a silica-covered sheet of steel here, and air-quench it, most of it burns away. What's left is a mixture of metallic silicates and oxides that I haven't been able to identify. The rate of heat loss on cooling is important too. I haven't been able to duplicate it in a chamber; only an open-air quench will do it. They *might* be able to duplicate the process on Earth, but I don't know how at the moment."

"Then," said Sanchez loudly, "we're in business again."

IV

THE DOME broke into noisy turmoil. Loud and piercing over the noise came the rebel yell, and Beverage revelled in it. Things were back to normal. Only the captain stood silent and morose in the midst of the racket, biting his lower lip. Gradually his somberness spread, and soon they were quiet again, looking at him.

As soon as it was quiet enough to speak he said, "Look, I hate to throw cold water on this, but I don't see how it's going to work."

"Why not?" said Sanchez. "The Doc says he can do it, and if he says so he can."

The captain shook his head. "It's not that. It's the weight problem. This may be the hottest alloy ever seen, but it isn't a mat-

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ter of life and death the way the drug was. These ships can only carry about eleven tons of payload. The cost will be so high it won't be worth it, even for an alloy like this."

Beverage started to say something, but Sanchez said, "Aw, come on, Harry. They won't pay for a thing like this?"

Ursula said, "Will you two shut up and let Nathaniel speak?"

This time Nathaniel fully realized that she had interceded for him. To his surprise he liked it. Right in front of everybody he said to her, "Thank you, Suly." She reached out and patted his hand, and he squeezed it. Then he turned to the captain and said, "Your ship is sheathed with half-inch nickel steel. If we take off the sheathing and treat it by this process and then put it back, you'll have one-sixth inch plates that are far stronger than your half inch plates now; that'll save a lot of weight. Also, you did not mention earlier that the density of this alloy is about 4 grams per cubic centimeter, just about half that of your present sheathing. The weight saving per ship is about 294 tons. The old sheathing weighed 353 tons while the new weighs only 59 tons. So you can take back to Earth 59 tons of the alloy *as the sheathing*. We ought to be able to find places aboard the ship to store the other 294 tons, plus the eleven tons payload you had in the first

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place. It all comes down to the fact that you can carry 364 tons of the alloy back with you; that's over 30 times your original payload. Think that might be economical?"

The captain had followed Beverage's figures, and he replied by sticking out his hand and seizing Beverage's; he shook the hand and nodded his head at the same time. He stepped back, threw his arms up in the air and said, "That's it, man, that's it. That's the answer to all your problems. I'll put a call in to Earth and have the other ships come on here for the treatment. Can you handle them?"

"Yes," said Beverage, "if everybody in the colony is willing to work long hours, we can do it."

THERE was a great deal of loud noise from the assembled men and women in the dome.

The captain said, "Why stop with the sheathing? Why can't you treat the entire framework — right through the whole ship?"

Beverage said, "We can, but the ship's design ought to be changed; there's no sense continuing a design meant for heavy sheathing and unyielding frames. I've got a design for a new kind of space ship that is lighter, stronger, and faster than any we have now. I don't see why we can't build them here. There's plenty of iron and nickel here, although it is deep underground. I think we can go into the business of building better space ships."

"Well," said Sanchez. "That's what we've been . . . Very good, Doc. Let's plan on that."

Beverage nodded and began to form some words, but Sanchez turned to the captain and opened his mouth to speak.

Ursula said, "Just a minute. Nathaniel hasn't finished speaking yet."

Sanchez turned back with a guilty look, and said, "Oh, I'm sorry Doc. Shoot."

"It is possible," said Beverage, "that they will be able to dupli-

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cate this process on Earth in a few years. If that happens we will find ourselves in the same posture we were in this morning. So I have some suggestions to make for our future activities." He stopped to clear his throat, and there were no interruptions. He noted that Ursula was listening intently, and he felt very much at ease. "I've been able to make a heterocyclic compound of carbon and indium. The free valences of the indium atom enter readily into polymerization reactions. The resulting plastics and elastomers can be used to make vehicular tires that won't wear out in a lifetime — the old lifetime, that is. They also make the best potting materials for transistors I've ever seen — high heat dissipation and excellent mechanical ruggedness. The high molecular weight polymers are rigid and very light, and might even make better space-ship sheathing than the new alloy; we'd have to look into that. The reactions are carried out in liquid ozone, so Earth might have trouble duplicating them. Another thing. It turns out that helium subjected to hot liquid ozone under pressure becomes activated. I've been able to make a reaction product of helium and silicon dioxide. It looks just like glass but it's stronger — quite a bit stronger, I might say. Also it absorbs a broad band of heat radiation and reemits it as electrical energy at the edges. I suspect that a sheet of the material is a single crystal, so it doubtless has some other interesting properties. It might make a good self-powered dome to live in on planets like this; there's always thermal radiation around. If we make fibers out of it and weave it into cloth we might have a better kind of clothing, too." He stopped and frowned at the table top. "There's another thing. I've been able to introduce amine groups into cellulose molecules with one of the high-pressure ozone methods. I made a draw-down of the material and the resulting film seems to survive on living flesh. I don't know, though." He pulled up the right sleeve of his coverall, held up his right arm, and critically inspected the forearm in the light, turning it this way and that. "I tried it on myself and it seems to be working out. It's been on about two months now. It's a little shiny and there's no hair growing on it, but we may be able to take care of that. It might do for skin grafts."

HE DROPPED his arm and sat quietly, pursing his lips, wondering which project to mention next. The silence was thunderous. Sanchez finally shook his head and looked appealingly at

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Ursula. She took no notice, since she, like everyone else, was staring open-mouthed at Beverage. Sanchez shook his head again and said, "Well, yes, Doc. That is . . . That ought to tide us over for awhile."

Beverage looked up as if about to speak, but he did not.

"Well," said the captain. "We've got a lot of work to do. I guess we better get at it. I'll get my crew ready." He left.

Beverage stood up and said, "Yes, I have a lot to do, too." He turned to Ursula. "Would you come out with me, Ursula? I would like to talk to you."

She nodded and got up and followed him to the door; the others all stepped back to let them pass. Beverage stepped through the inner door, held it momentarily for Ursula, and then stepped into the outer chamber ahead of her. He raised his mask to put it on, but a strap caught under his nose. He pushed the mask straight out in front of his face, and there reflected in the facepiece he saw a tableau taking place behind him.

Ursula had paused in the inner doorway, air streaming around her. Her left hand was raised toward the group in the dome, and the point of her forefinger met the point of her thumb, forming a circle. The other three fingers of her hand stuck straight up, and her wrist was bent back. In the brief flash in which he saw the scene Beverage saw every person in the dome respond by making the same sign to Ursula, some of them wagging their hands. Then she stepped through the door and let it slam. Beverage briefly wondered what it was all about, but immediately forgot it in the press of thinking of what he wanted to say to Ursula.

Outside, he said to her, "Suly, I'd like to ask you something. But I'd like to ask you from the crest of the hill. Will you go up there with me?"

"Yes, Nathaniel. Yes." And she slipped an arm through his and hugged it. Quietly they walked toward the crest of the hill together.

"Nathaniel," she said as they approached the top. "Were you going to say something else back in there?"

"Yes, I was, Suly. But it can wait. The fourth planet of this system — you know, Sulphos — has an atmosphere of almost pure carbon disulphide. We might be able to do some interesting things there. I was going to ask if some of our people here would go there with me sometime, but I was afraid they'd say no. Do you think they would?"

"Yes," she said, "I think they would."

— THEODORE L. THOMAS

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My Lady Selene

By MAGNUS LUDENS

Everyone knows the Moon is dead.
Everyone is quite correct — now!

ON IMPACT he'd had time to see Hatter's head jerk loose from the carefully weakened strap. As Hatter slumped unconscious he touched the hidden switch.

A shock, then darkness.

What first came to him out of the humming blackout mist was his own name: Marcusson. Al Marcusson, just turned sixteen that Saturday in June, that green-leafed day his father had called him out to the back yard. They had sat on discount-house furniture under the heavy maple, Al who wore jeans and sneakers and a resigned expression, his father who wore glasses, a sport shirt, slacks, eyelet shoes and a curious reckless smile, a smile that didn't belong in the picture.

"Now you're sixteen, Al, there's something I have to tell you," his father had begun. "My father told me when I turned sixteen, and his father told him. First, the name of our family isn't Marcusson. It's Marcopoulos. Your name's Alexander Marcopoulos."

"What? Dad, you must be kidding! Look, all the records . . ."

"The records don't go back far enough. Our name was changed four generations back, but the legal records disappeared in the usual convenient courthouse fire. As far as anyone knows, our family's name's always been Marcusson. My grandfather went to

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Minnesota and settled among the Swedes there. Unlike most foreigners he'd taken pains to learn good English beforehand. And Swedish. He was good at languages." For a moment the out-of-place smile came back. "All our family is. Languages, math, getting along with people, seldom getting lost or confused. You better pay attention, Al. This is the only time I'm going to speak of our family, like my father. We never bothered much, by the way, about how our name was written. You can believe me or think I sat in the sun too long, but I'll tell you how our most famous relatives spelled it: Marco Polo."

"Oh, now . . ."

"Never mind what you think now. Besides, I won't answer any questions, anyway. My father didn't and he was right. I found out some things by myself later; you'll probably find out more. For example, the best job for us is still exploring. That's why I became an oil geologist, and it paid off. Another thing: learning the legends of the place you're in, if you take up exploring, can mean the difference between success and a broken neck. That's all, boy. Guess I'll get your mother some peonies for the supper table."

Al Marcusson had gone up quietly to his room. Later, his special gift for languages and math got him through college and engineering school; his sense of direction and lack of inner-ear trouble helped to get him chosen for Astronaut training while he was in the Air Force.

While in training at the Cape he had met and married a luscious brunette librarian in one of the sponge-fishing towns, a brunette with a rather complicated last name that became forgotten as she turned into Mrs. Marcusson, and unbeatable recipes for the most bewitching cocktails since Circe held the shaker for Ulysses.

Marcusson's hobbies included scuba diving, electronic tinkering and reading. His psychiatrists noted a tendency to reserve, even secrecy, which was not entirely bad in a man who worked with classified material and had to face long periods of time alone. Besides, his ability to get along with people largely compensated.

WITH slowly returning consciousness the last months of training swam in Al Marcusson's mind. The orbital flight — the only part of it he'd really enjoyed was the quarter-hour alone with SARAH, the electronic beacon, cut off from Control and even from the rescue team just over the horizon, alone with the music of wind and sea.

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For the moon shot he'd been responsible for communications, recording and sensing systems inside the capsule, as Hatter had for the life-support systems and their two back-up men for propulsion and ground systems coordination respectively. He relived the maddening, risky business of the master switch to be secretly connected with the capsule's several brains and camouflaged. The strap to be weakened. Then the blind terror of launch when his pulse had topped 120; blurred vision, clenched teeth, the suit digging into him, the brief relief of weightlessness erased by the cramped, terrifying ride filled with new sensations and endless petty tasks. The camera eye pitilessly trained on his helmet. The way things had of staying there when you'd put them away. On Earth — already it was "On Earth," as if Earth was a port he'd sailed from — you put things out of your mind, but here they bobbed before you still, like the good luck charm in its little leather bag, for instance, the charm his wife had tied to one of his fastener tabs and that kept dancing in the air like a puppet, jerking every time he breathed.

Every time he breathed in the familiar sweat-plastic-chemicals smell, familiar because he'd been smelling it in training, in the transfer truck, in the capsule mock-up for months. All that should be new and adventurous had become stale and automatic through relentless training. His eyes rested on the color-coded meters and switches that were associated with nausea in the centrifuge tumbler-trainer. The couch made him think of long hours in the chlorinated pool — he always used to come out with his stomach rumbling and wrinkled white fingers, despite the tablets and the silicone creams. His skin itched beneath the adhesive pads that held the prying electrodes to his body, itched like the salt and sand itch he felt after swimming between training bouts. It was still Florida air he breathed, but filters had taken out its oil-fouled hot smell, its whiffs of canteen cooking, fish, seaweed and raw concrete in the sun. Hatter's and his own sing-song bit talk, so deliciously new to television audiences, rang trite in his own ears: a makeshift vocabulary, primer sentences chosen for maximum transmission efficiency to Control.

The Control center he remembered from having watched orbital flights himself. Machines that patiently followed pulse rate, breathing, temperature. Squiggly lines, awkward computer handwriting, screens where dots jumped, screens that showed in-

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strument panels, screens where his own helmet showed, and inside it the squirming blob that was his own face, rendered as a kind of rubberized black-and-white tragic mask. He felt the metal ears turning, questing for signals, the little black boxes, miniaturized colossi tracking, listening, spewing tape. On the capsule itself — all folded in like Japanese water flowers — sensors, cameras, listeners, analyzers should have burgeoned on impact, shot up, reached out, grasped, retracted, analyzed, counted, transmitted.

But he'd cut the switch.

AL MARCUSSON blinked awake.

He set about freeing himself, a task comparable to getting a butterfly alive out of a spider web. Every creak of his suit and of the moulded couch sound loud and flat in the newly silent capsule. His breathing soughed about him. But no signal went out from the electrodes taped to his chest to say that his heart beat had again topped a hundred, that he sweated, that his stomach contracted — even though he was under no gravity strain, the emergency cooling worked, and his latest no-crumbs, low-residue meal had been welcomed by the same stomach an hour earlier.

He sat up. The port gave off a pale creamy glow. He leaned forward and could see nothing except for a cream- or eggshell-colored mist, even and opaque.

He undid his glove-rings and took off his gloves. By the gleam of his wrist-light he checked whether Hatter was breathing correctly from his suit, visor down, and not the capsule's air, then put his gloves on again and bled the air slowly out. They were not supposed to leave the capsule, of course. Still the possibility of having to check or repair something had had to be considered and it was theoretically possible. He began the nerve-rasping egress procedure, through the narrow igloo-lock that seemed to extend painful claws and knobs to catch at every loop and fold of his suit. At last he gave a frantic wiggle and rolled free.

Because of the dead switch, turning antennae circled in vain, pens stopped reeling out ink, screens stayed blank. The men in the control room activated emergency signals but got no triggered responses. Meanwhile, television reporters sent frantic requests for background material fillers, their "and now back to's" falling thick and fast.

Al Marcusson bounced on a kind of lumpy featherbed two or three times before coming to rest in the same eggshell soup. Dust.

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Moon dust that had no particular reason for dropping back now cocooned the ship. He stood up with great care and staggered straight out, putting his feet down slowly to minimize dust puffs. The mist thinned and he rubbed the gloves against his visor and goggled.

Cliffs, craters, spines, crests and jags stood there as in the photographs except for a curious staginess he realized came from the harsh footlights effect of the twilight zone they'd landed in and from the shorter horizon with its backdrop of old black velvet dusty with stars. But the colors!

Ruby cliffs, surfaces meteor-pitted in places to a rosy bloom, rose to pinnacles of dull jade that fell again in raw emerald slopes; saffron splashes of small craters punctuated the violet sponge of scattered lava, topaz stalagmites reared against sapphire crests, amethyst spines pierced agate ridges . . . and on every ledge, in every hollow, pale moondust lay like a blessing.

When you were a kid, did you ever wake up at night in a Pullman berth and hear the snoring and looked at the moonwashed countryside knowing you only were awake and hugging the knowledge to yourself? Did you ever set off alone at dawn to fish or hunt and watch the slow awakening of trees? Did you ever climb the wall into an abandoned estate and explore the park and suddenly come upon a statue half-hidden in honeysuckle, a statue with a secret smile?

Al Marcusson sat by himself on the twilight zone of the Moon and watched the sun shining through cloudy glass arches and throwing on moondust the same colored shadows that it throws through the great stained-glass windows on the flagstones of Chartres cathedral. He looked up at Earth, now in "New Earth" position, a majestic ring of blue fire flushed with violet, red and gold at the crescent where clouds flashed white iridescence. He jerked free the little bag that held his good luck charm and waited.

They came.

HE COULD see them silhouetted against Earth, the long undulating V of them. Now he could discern their wings beating in the vacuum that couldn't support them and heard the wild lonely honking through the vacuum that couldn't transmit sound. White wings surged steadily nearer. Soon there was a tempest of white, a tempest that stirred no dust, and the swans settled about him.

Al Marcusson stood up.

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"My Lady Selene," he began, speaking carefully although he knew that the sound could not be heard outside his helmet. "My Lady Luna, my Lady of the Swans, I greet you. I know of you through legends: I know you are Aphrodite the Swan-Rider, goddess of love that drives to suicide. I know you are the White Goddess, the Three-Women-in-One, who changes your slaves into swans. I know of your twin daughters, Helen the fair, bane of Troy, and dark Clytemnestra, Mycenae's destroyer. I know of your flight as the Wyrd of death who took great Beowulf of the Geats, of your quests as Diana of the cruel moonlit hunts; I remember your swan-wings shadowing the hosts of Prince Igor on the steppes, I have seen the rings of your sacred Hansa swans decorating the moon-shaped steps of temples in Ceylon, your flights of swans and geese on painted tombs beyond the Nile. The witches of my own Thessaly called upon you to work their spells. On the feast of Beltane, on the first of May, with hawthorn branches blooming white as your swans, the Celts did you honor. The folk on the Rhine brought you figurines of white clay and long remembered your wild Walpurgisnacht. But as other beliefs drove out the old, you went from the minds of men to those of children. Only in Andersen's tales do you still change your slaves into swans, only children understand the spells held in the foolish rhymes of Mother Goose. Children know of the lady who flies on goose's back, her cape dark behind her, and each generation in turn still listens to your spells, my Lady of the Swans. And sometimes poets, and sometimes hunters, and sometimes lovers look up at the moon and are afraid and acknowledge your power."

Al Marcusson stopped. The birds ringed him in. He held up his good luck charm, a small, carved rock-crystal swan, such as are found in the very ancient tombs of the bronze-age sea kings of the Aegean.

"My Lady Selene," he cried, "I bring an offering! I came alone, before the others, to tell you the new beliefs now come to your dwelling. I came to warn you, my Lady of the Swans, to beg you not to be wrathful against us, unwilling intruders, to ask you to take up your dwelling in another place, but not to deprive us of poetry, of witching spells and dreams, and all that the Moon has meant to us." He threw the crystal swan before him.

The plumes about him foamed and a snowy form emerged, a moonstone with black opal eyes who smiled and began to sing.

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Marcusson's knees gave and his eyes closed. Then she spread great swan wings and soared, circling far lest her shadow fall on the crumpled spacesuited figure. She rose. And her swans — her thousand myriad swans — rose after her out of cracks, caves and craters, from beneath overhangs, from ledges, hollows and rockfalls, their plumes at first stained with the colors of the stone. They winged away, V after sinuous V, across Earth and into space. When the last swan had left the Moon became just another piece of colored rock.

AL MARCUSSON opened his eyes and made his way dully back into the dust cloud now shot with flashes of red-orange as Earth's laser beams searched for the capsule's nerve centers. He bumped against a strut and forced his way in.

A hum filled the capsule. Ungainly jointed limbs, paddles, calyxes, sprouted from its outside walls. On Earth pens jiggled, tapes were punched, rows of figures in five columns appeared on blank pages, pulses jumped and two groggy, worn-out faces appeared on the control room screens. Hatter's eyes flickered over the boards and he opened his mouth. Some time later his disembodied voice came out of the monitor, reading dials, reporting on systems. Then the screens showed Al Marcusson's eyes opening in turn. Control could see him leaning forward towards the port, his face drawn in haggard lines and shadows, then letting his head fall back. "Hey," he said, "didn't Doc tell you guys dust gives me hay fever?"

On Earth the men about the screens slapped each other's backs and grinned and wiped their eyes. Good old bellyaching Marcusson! Good old Al! The Moon was just another piece of rock, after all.

But a star went nova in Cygnus, and lovers wished on it that night. — MAGNUS LUDENS

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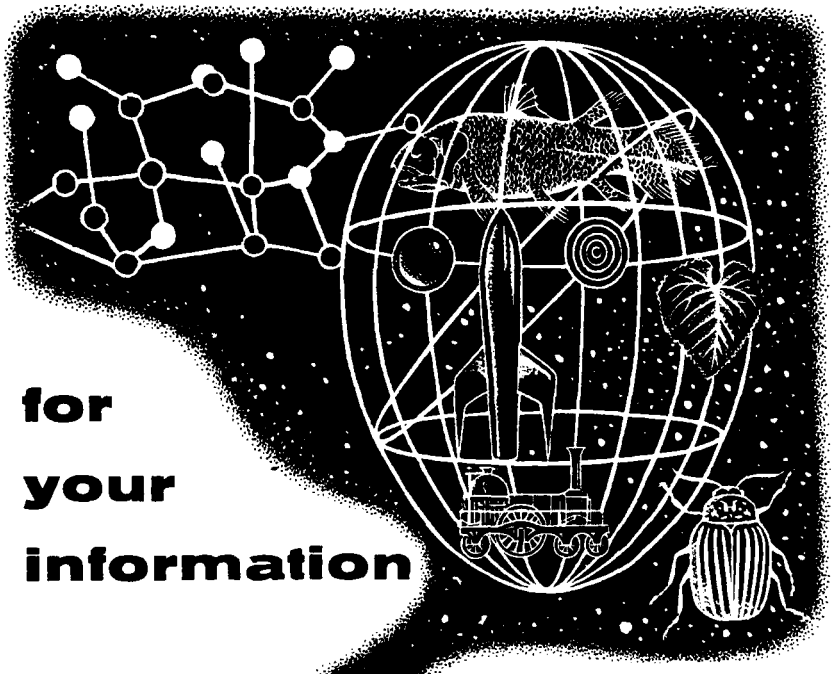

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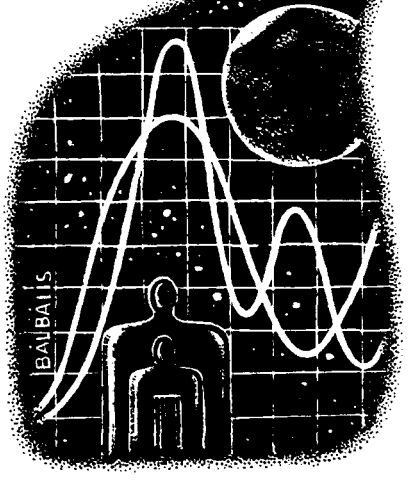

BY WILLY LEY

TOO MUCH IMAGINATION

TO the best of my knowledge the flying saucer myth never passed through the iron curtain, except for being ridiculed in the official Russian press. But that does not mean that the Russians are not addicted to the hunting of spurious mysteries too. Contrary to a fairly widespread belief, Soviet censorship does not interfere in such matters as long as the mysteries, real or imagined, have nothing to do with political dogma. Authors can even quote

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the Bible, provided it is treated as a historical work without religious significance.

For example the *Literaturnaya Gazyeta* ("Literary Gazette"), which once upon a time ran articles bitterly denouncing science fiction, printed an article in which the destruction of Sodom was "tentatively explained" as the result of a nuclear explosion, and the damage done Lot's wife was blindness from having watched the explosion at close range! The same article explained the so-called Baalbek Verandah in Lebanon—a large area paved with big stone slabs — as an ancient spaceport, used by cosmonauts from another planet.

But the favorite exercise ground for untrammeled Russian imaginations is a place in the Soviet Union itself, an area in Central Siberia where a natural catastrophe took place in 1908. In astronomical literature this catastrophe goes under the name of the "Great Siberian Meteor of 1908", or the Podkamennaya Tunguska Meteorite.

THE facts of the case can be quickly told: A few minutes after 7 AM on June 30, 1908, observers in Central Siberia saw a fiery body come up over the southern horizon. It looked more blinding than the sun which was in the sky at the same time, and moved rapidly almost due North. Shortly thereafter a "pillar of fire" could be seen shooting upward. An enormous black cloud followed. A number of explosions were heard in quick succession, and at least one witness felt a shock wave in the ground which he described as being "like a single wave in the sea." Barographs as far west as London registered a shock wave in the atmosphere but seismographs outside of Russia did not register any ground shock.

On the following day meteorologists in Asia and Europe noticed "noctilucent clouds", silvery-looking clouds at extreme altitudes. All of them were immediately reminded of the noctilucent clouds that had hovered in the upper atmosphere for several years after the explosion of the volcano Rakata on Krakatoa in 1883. But when Krakatoa blew up, shock waves in the air had circled the globe several times, a wave in the ocean had been detected on the coast of California and all seismographs had quivered.

Here only a comparatively small aerial shockwave had preceded the noctilucent clouds. It could not have been a major volcanic catastrophe. At least one German meteorologist concluded that the "disturbance in the atmosphere", as he called it, had probably been caused by a large

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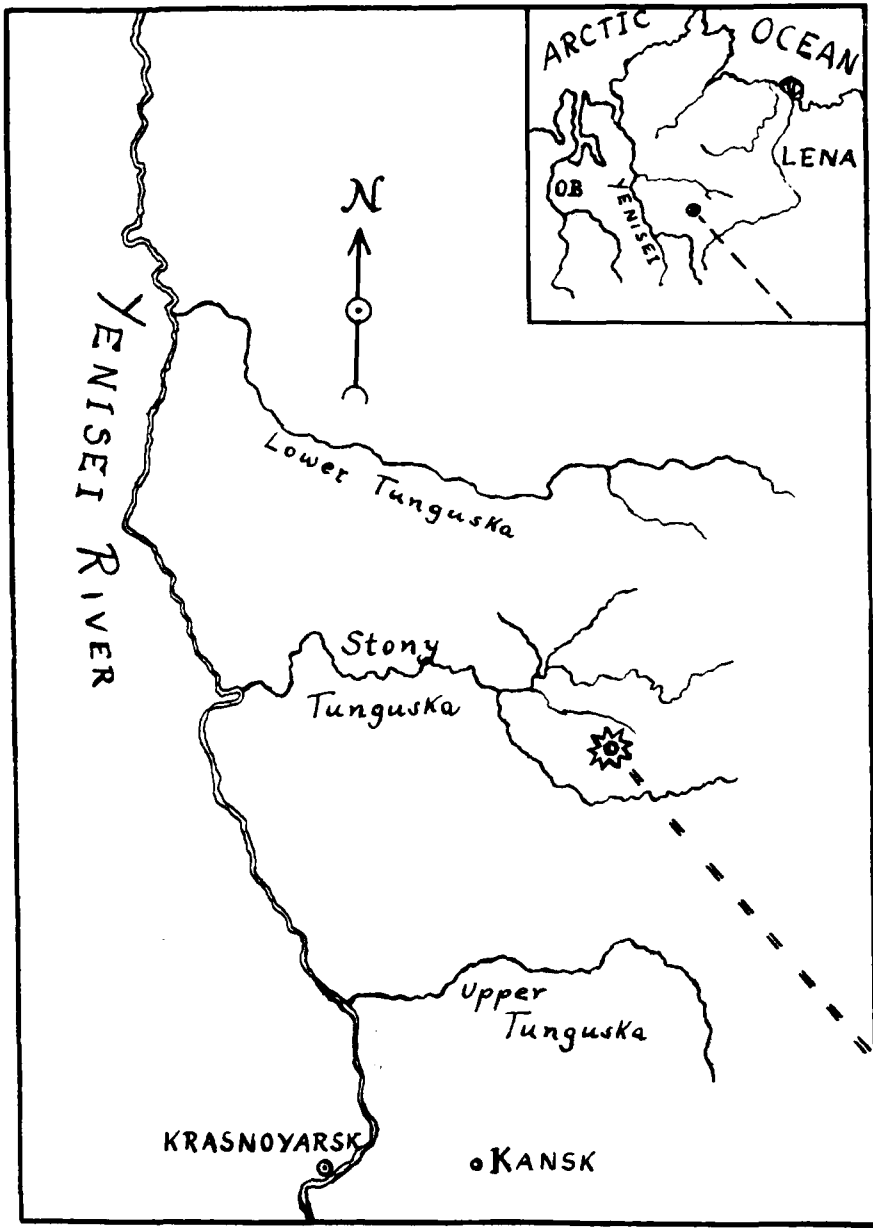

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meteorite. In Russia scientists seem to have concluded that there had been an earthquake in Central Siberia. Probably they were happy that it had struck in a virtually uninhabited area. Tentatively it was concluded that the earthquake had been near the small city of Kansk. There was no official action.

It was not until 1920 that a Russian scientist, professor L. A. Kulik, having convinced himself that the "earthquake" must have been a meteorite impact, tried to find the place where it had struck.

His tiny and severely underfinanced expedition accomplished only two things. He proved that the meteorite had *not* landed near Kansk, and he collected a number of eyewitness reports from people old enough to remember the event. In the meantime an astronomer of the Irkutsk Observatory, A. V. Voznesensky, had concluded, from eyewitness stories and the few records there were, that the impact must have taken place near the sources of the Podkamennaya Tunguska river. The name means "stony Tunguska". It is the middle river of three more or less parallel rivers, all named Tunguska, which flow westward into the Yenisei.

Kulik's next expedition, in 1927, did reach the impact area. He found a large circle of trees blown down, their trunks all pointing toward a central spot. Between the center and the fallen trees Kulik found a dead forest, the trunks standing but all the tops broken off. Farther away trees were found showing traces of burns on the side of their trunks facing the center. Kulik also noticed that in every case where a tree top had been broken off, or branches had been broken off, the place of breakage showed burns.

But Kulik could not find the large crater that could be expected in the center. There were a number of not very deep holes, all filled with water. And that was all.

Since there was no main crater, Kulik concluded that the meteorite which had struck there was not a solid body but a "cloud" of meteoric fragments. Naturally he looked for such fragments but could not find any. He concluded that they had all disappeared from sight in the marshy ground.

But subsequent expeditions returned with the same negative results. Gradually the Podkamennaya Tunguska meteorite became a mystery. Here you had an area which bore all the signs of a major impact, you had eyewitness stories corroborating this evidence. And you could not find a single trace of the meteorite itself!

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Since there was absolutely no way of getting around the evidence only one conclusion was possible: the meteorite must have been of a kind which completely disappeared afterwards.

Leonid Kulik, who personally believed that it had been an iron meteorite, made more expeditions into the roadless and swampy area, without great success. Still no main crater—it is now definite that there is none—and still no fragments of the meteorite. Only a story by one of the natives of the area, the Tunguses, that another native had told him that a third one had shown him a piece of metal which looked like silver. By 1938 the first aerial photographs were taken, but either the equipment was wrong for the purpose or the photographer had no experience in taking pictures from the air. The pictures were so poor that they could be called worthless. Then came the second world war and investigation stopped. Moreover Kulik, who in spite of his age (he was then 58) had volunteered for military duty, was wounded and taken prisoner by the Germans. He died in the prison camp.

BY the time Kulik made his last expedition, 1938-39, at least one new theory about the disappearing meteorite had been formed and was discussed for a while. If the meteorite had been contraterrene matter everything could be explained. (As *Galaxy* readers know, contraterrene matter is identical with ours except that the charges are reversed—the electron being positive, the proton negative, etc.) Contraterrene matter would react violently with normal matter, liberating enormous amounts of energy by a mutual particle-for-particle annihilation. Since this reaction would, of course, start in the atmosphere the unusual brightness of the body would be accounted for. The mutual annihilation of matter would release enough energy to account for the observed devastation. And, of course, the meteorite would disappear down to its last atom, taking an equal mass of earth matter along. The site of the impact would be strongly radioactive afterwards — but the impact had taken place in 1908 and the first investigation was not until 1927. And Kulik's party had not carried any Geiger counters, so that they could not check on traces of radioactivity that might still have been there.

By 1947 another expedition to the Podkamennaya Tunguska was delayed by a most curious coincidence. In eastern Siberia, a few hundred miles north of Vladivostok, a large meteorite was seen to fall and all the scientific

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talent was rushed to the Sikhôté-Alin mountains. It was a large iron meteorite, all right. It had broken up during the passage through the atmosphere and produced over 120 craters of all sizes, the largest about 90 feet across. But there was no mystery about the Sikhôté-Alin meteorite, through it delayed another expedition to the Tunguska.

At that point a Russian engineer and science writer by the name of Aleksandr Kazântsev had entered the debate. His thesis was that the meteorite of 1908 had not been a meteorite at all, but a spaceship.

Kazântsev did not hesitate to elaborate. It had been a huge atomic-powered interstellar ship which had approached our solar system, first investigating the outer planets and finally approaching Earth, which clearly proved to be inhabited. The captain of the ship, circling the earth several times, decided to find an uninhabited area to land so as not to harm the inhabitants of Earth inadvertently. But as he entered the atmosphere for a landing in Siberia something went wrong. Possibly the aliens had misjudged the density of the earth's atmosphere. The ship heated up and became uncontrollable, and on touching the ground, or just above it, the atomic engine exploded, vaporizing the ship, flattening out the forest below and setting the taiga on fire.

An atomic explosion of that type, Kazântsev maintained, would explain not only the observed phenomena but also the absence of any meteoritic material. Russian astronomers were presumably still shaking their heads when Kazântsev received the support of another science writer by the name of Boris Liapûnov.

Between them they seem to have succeeded in convincing a fair percentage of the Russian reading public that an interstellar expedition crashed in Siberia in 1908.

By 1957 a careful analysis of soil samples from the site, collected by Kulik, was carried out. Small globules of meteoric iron were discovered and found to contain 7 per cent of nickel, 0.7 per cent of cobalt and traces of germanium and copper. This is a rather typical composition of iron meteorites — and it should be stated right here that this meteoric iron may well have no connection with the fall of 1908 at all. Such tiny bits of meteoric iron can be found anywhere on Earth if you search long enough; the daily infall of meteoric matter is now estimated to be around 1000 tons per day. The globules found may thus have fallen at any time in history.

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BUT Kazântsev, in a manner reminiscent of our flying saucer "researchers," pounced on the composition. Iron plus nickel plus cobalt? Obviously a piece of the alloy which formed the tough outer skin of the spaceship. Traces of copper? Surely they must have had electrical equipment on board, requiring copper wires. He could have said the same if the traces had been traces of silver. And germanium? Why not? Electronic gear requires semi-conductors which can be germanium compounds. The explosion, according to Kazântsev, took place before the ship touched the ground, therefore the trees directly below were merely stripped of their crowns (and ignited) while the trees farther away, struck by the blast at an angle, were knocked down. The "pillar of fire" topped by a large cloud could only have been an atomic explosion, Kazântsev declared. (This happens not to be the case. You can get very similar clouds from any large explosion.) And the silvery clouds noticed by the meteorologists were the explosion débris, luminous because atomic disintegration was still going on. (Yet the clouds caused by the Krakatoa catastrophe looked the same and Krakatoa's blow-up holds no atomic mystery.) To finish up his case, Kazântsev dragged in an alleged native legend, namely that the god Ogda burned Tunguses with "invisible fire." Obviously, he wrote, some natives approached the blast site so soon after the event that local atomic fallout burned and killed them.

One more supporter of the spaceship theory who turned up in 1958 was the airplane designer A. Y. Manotskov.

Manotskov had checked on the eyewitness reports gathered mainly by Kulik in 1921 and 1927 and tried to calculate both the flightpath and the velocity of the body. Eyewitness reports, if they state the position of the observer and cite landmarks, can give a fairly accurate picture of the direction of a flightpath but are absolutely valueless when it comes to speed of travel. The speed of a low-flying slow body and of a high-flying fast body can look exactly the same — as anybody living near an airport can see for himself, when comparing the apparent speed of a small executive plane coming in for a landing and a jet passing overhead at 26,000 feet. Manotskov arrived at the conclusion that the "meteorite" moved at the rate of only about 1500 miles per hour. But if it was so slow, the observed devastation required a very large body, one well over one kilometer (0.6 miles) in diameter. A meteorite that size *must* have left débris.

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Since none has been found it had to be a spaceship.

At about that time Kazantsev made an interesting about-face.

Having read about contraterrene matter — he called it "antimatter" — he said that one did not need to assume that the ship's engine exploded. It was at least equally likely that the ship came from a planet consisting of antimatter, and that its captain and crew never guessed that the matter composing Earth was of the opposite kind. With that theory Kazantsev agreed with western ideas it could have been a contraterrene meteorite. He substituted a contraterrene spaceship for a natural body. Apparently he did not notice that his acceptance of contraterrene matter contradicted his earlier conclusions drawn from the composition of the meteoritic globules found on the site. If his alien ship had germanium semi-conductors that would have been contraterrene germanium and nothing would have been left to analyze.

THE Soviet Academy of Sciences paid for another expedition in 1957, headed by professor Kirill P. Florénsky, who saw to it that there were Geiger counters among the equipment. The radioactivity of the soil was found to be perfectly normal — which admittedly might well be the case after nearly half a century, especially since there were no figures about the radioactivity of that area before the catastrophe. And Florensky's expedition definitely established the absence of a major crater. Now everything was what it had been like thirty years earlier: all the evidence of a major impact, but no crater and no meteoritic fragments. The only new item added was the proved absence of above-normal radioactivity.

While Florensky was still in Siberia, the astronomer and space travel expert Ariy Shternfeld made a few devastating comments about the professional ability of Kazântsev's spaceship captain. As our earth orbits the sun the area which has dawn is the "front side." Since the impact took place at 7 o'clock in the morning, Siberia was still on the "front side" of the moving earth. Hence Earth and spaceship collided head-on.

Any spaceship captain worth his four stripes (or just one and a half of them) would trail a moving planet on which he wished to make planetfall, which means that he would land between, say, 9 and 10 P.M. of local time of the landing area.

This simple fact had been overlooked by Kazântsev, by Liapunov, by Manotskov and by everybody else who had written and

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orated about the "spaceship crash of 1908."

Well, is there an answer at all?

Remember that the main and at first glance somewhat disturbing result of all the facts is that the meteorite had to "disappear" completely. This requirement, in fact, was the main reason why a contra-terrene meteorite was postulated by some. Anybody who wishes to believe this may safely do so. Nothing speaks against this possibility. But there are others.

Supposing the meteorite had just been a hundred thousand tons of water and ice. It would have completely disappeared during the same summer and would have caused just as much devastation. But the pillar of fire and the burning of the taiga speaks against it. A sufficiently hard impact of a very large lump of ice would produce temperatures high enough to ignite wood; but it would also smother the fire at once.

However, there is one type of cosmic body which would do everything the Tunguska meteorite did and would not necessarily smother a fire set by its impact, but it would completely disappear just the same. This body is a comet.

Some thirty years ago the astronomical concept of a comet was that it consisted of a loose accumulation of cosmic matter holding a large amount of gases — like ammonia, methane and ordinary water. Then Fred L. Whipple showed that things had to be the other way round. A loose cloud of meteoric matter could not hold enough gas. A comet had to consist in the main of frozen gases, probably holding some particles of cosmic dust imbedded in it.

The impact of a small comet would produce all the phenomena observed in Siberia. And it would completely disappear: the ammonia and methane would mingle with the atmosphere (the methane probably burning up) while the water would also go into the atmosphere as more water vapor.

The Russians have accepted this explanation — the Russian astronomers, that is, not Kazântsev and company. The combustion of methane, of course, just produces carbon dioxide and water vapor ($CH_4 + 2O_2 = CO_2 + 2H_2O$) which would be undistinguishable; but the other frozen gases of which a comet is likely to consist might leave a chemical residue in the soil.

Russian chemists are busy with soil samples from the Tunguska area again, this time looking for something else. If they succeed the theory of collision with a small comet would be permanently vindicated.

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QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

I know that the names of the days of the week were orginally the names of planets. That is, each planet had its special day. But they seem to use different planets in English and in French. And I cannot figure out why the names appear in the order in which they do appear. Is there any system or is it just accident?

Gertrude Hoffner
Chicago, Ill.

The names of the planets were indeed used by the Romans, but the reference was more to the *gods* associated with the various planets. This accounts, as you'll see, for some of the differences between English and French and other languages as well. First you you have to realize that the names were given in pre-Copernican days, so that the sun and the moon appear as "planets." The (to us) strange sequence of the planets is the result of the ancient belief that the planets ruled one hour of each day in succession. The first hour of the first day indubitably was ruled by the outermost planet, Saturn; the second hour was then ruled by the next planet closer to the earth, namely Jupiter; the third hour by Mars, etc., etc.

Now, if Saturn rules the first hour of the day, it logically also rules the eighth, fifteenth and twenty-second hour. The twenty-third hour of that day must then be ruled by Jupiter and the twenty-fourth hour by Mars. This means that the first hour of the *next* day is ruled by the sun.

If you continue counting in this manner, you find that the first hour of each day (if we start with a day where the sun rules the first hour) is ruled by the planets in the following sequence: sun, moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn. The "ruler of the first hour" gave its name to the day. It happened to fit nicely that after one week the sun would again rule the first hour of the first day in the new week. (If it had not fitted, another system would probably have been evolved.)

Now look at the table of names. The first column, the Latin, is perfectly clear. The day of the sun is followed by the day of the moon and so on through the sequence just cited.

The second column, the English names, may be called an Anglo-Saxon translation of the Latin column. Again the day of the sun is followed by the day of the moon, but Mars has been replaced by the Germanic god of battles Tues. The next day is Woden's day; Woden (or Wotan, or Odin) is the "wanderer," like fast-moving Mercury. Jüpiter's

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THE NAMES OF THE DAYS OF THE WEEK

LATIN	ENGLISH	GERMAN	FRENCH	ITALIAN
Dies Solis	Sunday	Sonntag	Dimanche	Domenica
Dies Lunae	Monday	Montag	Lundi	Lunedi
Dies Martis	Tuesday	Dienstag	Mardi	Martedi
Dies Mercurii	Wednesday	Mittwoch	Mercredi	Mercoledi
Dies Jovis	Thursday	Donnerstag	Jeudi	Jovedi
Dies Veneris	Friday	Freitag	Vendredi	Venerdi
Dies Saturni	Saturday	Sonnabend Samstag	Samedi	Sabbato

day becomes Thor's day, while beautiful Venus has been replaced by the equally beautiful Germanic goddess Frigga (or Freya). But Saturday is still Saturn's day, even in English. The third column, the German column, is the German version of the English column, as can easily be seen. The main exception is Wednesday. The German name has no relation to mythology of any kind; *Mittwoch* just means "Middle of the Week." For the following day Donar is substituted for Thor. German has two names for Saturday; the North German form *Sonnabend* means Sunday Eve, analogous to Christmas Eve, while the South German form *Samstag* probably was influenced by the French. The French and Italian names follow, as you can see, the Latin very closely, except for Sunday which in both languages becomes the Lord's Day. And in Italian the Saturday is *Sabbato*. I may add here that until, say, 1910, the word Sabbath was used in German too with the meaning of Saturday, if the speaker came from a religious family or if the theme under discussion was religious.

Has there ever been a tribe of people, now or in the historical past, which had fur? I remember mention of "poodle men" in Russia, but consider this a hoax. Furthermore, is it known whether any prehistoric humans, like the Neanderthalers, had fur? Since my father is a minister who does not approve of evolution please don't print my name.

* * * *

West Virginia.

As for your father's disapproval of evolution I can only repeat what I once said before: if you fall out of a window on the 38th

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floor it does not matter whether you " believe" in the law of gravity. It — and evolution — do not depend on anybody's approval.

As for your question about a race of furred men the answer is no. No such race or tribe has ever turned up. The "Hairy Ainu" of Kamtchatka look as hairy as they are mainly because they never cut their head or body hair. (It may be worth mentioning that among the major racial groups the "whites" happen to be the hairiest.)

However, there was a Russian by the name of Adrian Yeftîkhev who did have a complete fur and was billed as the Poodle Man by a show manager. He lived around 1900 and is said to have been just one of a family of hairy people. This indubitably was an individual case. I even hesitate to use the term atavism, because we simply do not know whether our ancestors had a fur and if so what type of fur. At about the time Yeftîkhev was shown around the larger cities of Europe, a prehistoric picture was discovered in France. It showed a naked man, holding a stick (spear?) in one hand. He was portrayed crawling, obviously hunting game, and all over his naked body there were short lines. At first glance it looked as if the prehistoric artist had intended to indicate hair, but a careful examination of these short lines showed that they did not follow the lie of a fur, hence they were accepted generally as mere fill-in lines.

Of course our more remote proto-human ancestors probably had a fur of some kind, but we cannot be specific as to who and when.

With all the talk of "putting a man on the moon" in 1970, or 1968, or whatever, don't people overlook the difficulty of landing a ship on its exhaust so that it comes to rest just at the moon's surface? Please tell me what has been done about the problem.

John D. Macmillan
Merion, Penna.

Well, no. Nobody "overlooks" any difficulties; the reason why you don't read much about this at the present moment is probably due to the fact that several systems have been designed and are now under study. The principle is that a total velocity of about two miles per second has to be "killed". This velocity would be compounded of the gravitational pull of the moon, the motion of the moon plus any "surplus" velocity the ship itself might have. Now the problem is not to reduce a velocity of two miles per second to zero but reduce the velocity to zero at the moment the altitude above the lunar surface is zero.

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One suggestion that has been published runs as follows: the rocket will approach the moon tail first, of course. At a certain distance from the lunar surface, predetermined by calculation, the rocket motors will start working, reducing the velocity. The pre-calculation should be good enough to reduce the relative motions of the moon and the rocket to, say, 300 to 400 yards per second. By the time this is accomplished the distance of the rocket from the lunar surface will be on the order of one mile or so. Now a radar device takes over. Successive radar readings between ship and lunar surface will give both distance and relative velocity. Through a computing device these readings control the speed of the fuel-pumps. If the rocket is still one mile above the lunar surface and the relative velocity is down to 50 yards per second the pumps will be made to run quite slowly. They may even shut off completely for, say, 20 seconds. On the other hand if the altitude is down to a hundred yards and the velocity is still around 300 yards per second, the pumps will work at full speed.

This proposed system would become unreliable for the last 50 yards or so, since it is quite possible that the exhaust blast will then begin to kick up lunar dust and thereby confuse the radar readings. Another problem is that this device, as described, does not take a possible lateral drift into account.

But the problems are known and being thought about. Moreover, the first manned landing will be preceded by a number of "softlanded" unmanned devices which will point out any inadequacies which may exist in the first experimental systems.

— WILLY LEY

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

FORECAST

Clifford D. Simak has already written more than his share of the best science fiction published and, although it's obviously unfair for him to do so, the man goes right on writing it. Next issue we pridefully present Simak's newest science-fiction novel, *Here Gather the Stars*. It isn't only his newest. We think it is his best!

In the same issue, Gordon R. Dickson with a fast and funny novelette, Keith Laumer with an exciting novella, plus Willy Ley's informative column, etc. It's a good issue . . . .

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To Kworn the object was a roadblock, threatening his life. But it was also a high road to a magnificent future!

ON THE FOURTH PLANET

by J. F. BONE

Illustrated by FINLAY

THE UL Kworn paused in his search for food, extended his eye and considered the thing that blocked his path.

He hadn't notice the obstacle until he had almost touched it. His attention had been focused upon gleaning every feeder large enough to be edible from the lichens that covered his feeding strip. But the unexpected warmth radiating from the object had startled him. Sundown was at hand. There should be nothing living or non-living that radiated a fraction of the heat that was coming from the gleaming metal wall which lay before him. He expanded his mantle to trap the warmth as he pushed his eye up-

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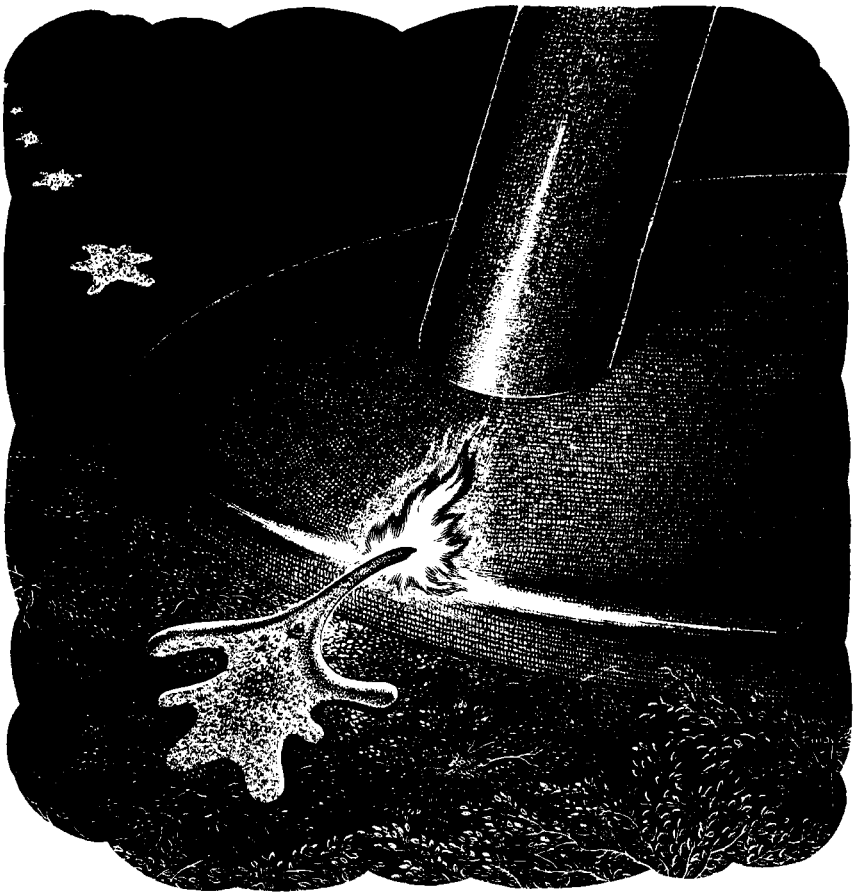

ward to look over the top. It wasn't high, just high enough to be a nuisance. It curved away from him toward the boundaries of his strip, extending completely across the width of his land.

A dim racial memory told him that this was an artefact, a product of the days when the Folk had leisure to dream and time to build. It had probably been built by his remote ancestors millennia ago and had just recently been uncovered from its hiding place beneath the sand. These metal objects kept appearing and disappearing as the sands shifted to the force of the wind. He had seen them before, but never a piece so large or so well pre-

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served. It shone as though it had been made yesterday, gleaming with a soft silvery luster against the blue-black darkness of the sky.

As his eye cleared the top of the wall, he quivered with shock and astonishment. For it was not a wall as he had thought. Instead, it was the edge of a huge metal disc fifty raads in diameter. And that wasn't all of it. Three thick columns of metal extended upward from the disc, leaning inward as they rose into the sky. High overhead, almost beyond the range of accurate vision, they converged to support an immense cylinder set vertically to the ground. The cylinder was almost as great in diameter as the disc upon which his eye first rested. It loomed overhead, and he had a queasy feeling that it was about to fall and crush him. Strange jointed excresences studded its surface, and in its side, some two-thirds of the way up, two smaller cylinders projected from the bigger one. They were set a little distance apart, divided by a vertical row of four black designs, and pointed straight down his feeding strip.

The Ul Kworn eyed the giant structure with disgust and puzzlement. The storm that had uncovered it must have been a great one to have blown so much sand away. It was just his fortune to have the thing squatting in his path! His mantle darkened with anger. Why was it that everything happened to him? Why couldn't it have lain in someone else's way, upon the land of one of his neighbors? It blocked him from nearly three thousand square raads of life-sustaining soil. To cross it would require energy he could not spare. Why couldn't it have been on the Ul Caada's or the Ul Varsi's strip — or any other of the numberless Folk? Why did he have to be faced with this roadblock?

He couldn't go around it since it extended beyond his territory and, therefore, he'd have to waste precious energy propelling his mass up the wall and across the smooth shining surface of the disc — all of which would have to be done without food, since his eye could see no lichen growing upon the shiny metal surface.

THE chill of evening had settled on the land. Most of the Folk were already wrapped in their mantles, conserving their energy until the dawn would warm them into life. But Kworn felt no need to estivate. It was warm enough beside the wall.

The air shimmered as it cooled. Microcrystals of ice formed upon the legs of the structure, outlining them in shimmering contrast to the drab shadowy

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landscape, with its gray-green cover of lichens stippled with the purple balls of the lichen feeders that clung to them. Beyond Kworn and his neighbors, spaced twenty raads apart, the mantled bodies of the Folk stretched in a long single line across the rolling landscape, vanishing into the darkness. Behind this line, a day's travel to the rear, another line of the Folk was following. Behind them was yet another. There were none ahead, for the Ul Kworn and the other Ul were the elders of the Folk and moved along in the first rank where their maturity and ability to reproduce had placed them according to the Law.

Caada and Varsi stirred restlessly, stimulated to movement by the heat radiating from the obstacle, but compelled by the Law to hold their place in the ranks until the sun's return would stimulate the others. Their dark crimson mantles rippled over the soil as they sent restless pseudopods to the boundaries of their strips.

They were anxious in their attempt to communicate with the Ul Kworn.

But Kworn wasn't ready to communicate. He held aloof as he sent a thin pseudopod out toward the gleaming wall in front of him. He was squandering energy; but he reasoned that he had better learn all he could about this thing before he attempted to cross it tomorrow, regardless of what it cost.

It was obvious that he would have to cross it, for the Law was specific about encroachment upon a neighbor's territory. *No member of the Folk shall trespass the feeding land of another during the Time of Travel except with published permission. Trespass shall be punished by the ejection of the offender from his place in rank.*

And that was equivalent to a death sentence.

He could ask Caada or Varsi for permission, but he was virtually certain that he wouldn't get it. He wasn't on particularly good terms with his neighbors. Caada was querulous, old and selfish. He had not reproduced this season and his vitality was low. He was forever hungry and not averse to slipping a sly pseudopod across the boundaries of his land to poach upon that of his neighbor. Kworn had warned him some time ago that he would not tolerate encroachment and would call for a group judgment if there was any poaching. And since the Folk were physically incapable of lying to one another, Caada would be banished. After that Caada kept his peace, but his dislike for Kworn was always evident.

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BUT Varsi who held the land on Kworn's right was worse. He had advanced to Ul status only a year ago. At that time there had been rumors among the Folk about illicit feeding and stealing of germ plasm from the smaller and weaker members of the race. But that could not be proved, and many young Folk died in the grim process of growing to maturity. Kworn shrugged. If Varsi was an example of the younger generation, society was heading hell-bent toward Emptiness. He had no love for the pushing, aggressive youngster who crowded out to the very borders of his domain, pressing against his neighbors, alert and aggressive toward the slightest accidental spillover into his territory. What was worse, Varsi had reproduced successfully this year and thus had rejuvenated. Kworn's own attempt had been only partially successful. His energy reserves hadn't been great enough to produce a viable offspring, and the rejuvenation process in his body had only gone to partial completion. It would be enough to get him to the winter feeding grounds. But as insurance he had taken a place beside Caada, who was certain to go into Emptiness if the feeding en route was bad.

Still, he hadn't figured that he would have Varsi beside him.

He consoled himself with the thought that others might have as bad neighbors as he. But he would never make the ultimate mistake of exchanging germ plasm with either of his neighbors, not even if his fertility and his position depended upon it. Cells like theirs would do nothing to improve the sense of discipline and order he had so carefully developed in his own. His offspring were courteous and honorable, a credit to the Folk and to the name of Kworn. A father should be proud of his offspring, so that when they developed to the point where they could have descendants, he would not be ashamed of what they would produce. An Ul, Kworn thought grimly, should have some sense of responsibility toward the all-important future of the race.

His anger died as he exerted synergic control. Anger was a waster of energy, a luxury he couldn't afford. He had little enough as it was. It had been a bad year. Spring was late, and winter had come early. The summer had been dry and the lichens in the feeding grounds had grown poorly. The tiny, bulbous lichen feeders, the main source of food for the Folk, had failed to ripen to their usual succulent fullness. They had been poor, shrunken things, hardly worth ingesting. And those along the route to the

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winter feeding grounds were no better.

Glumly he touched the wall before him with a tactile filament. It was uncomfortably warm, smooth and slippery to the touch. He felt it delicately, noting the almost microscopic horizontal ridges on the wall's surface. He palpated with relief. The thing was climbable. But even as he relaxed, he recoiled, the filament writhing in agony! The wall had burned his flesh! Faint threads of vapor rose from where he had touched the metal, freezing instantly in the chill air. He pinched off the filament in an automatic protective constriction of his cells. The pain ceased instantly, but the burning memory was so poignant that his mantle twitched and shuddered convulsively for some time before the reflexes died.

THOUGHTFULLY he ingested his severed member. With a sense of numbing shock he realized that he would be unable to pass across the disc. The implications chilled him. If he could not pass, his land beyond the roadblock would be vacant and open to preemption by his neighbors. Nor could he wait until they had passed and rejoin them later. The Law was specific on that point. *If one of the Folk lags behind in his rank, his land becomes vacant and open to his neighbors. Nor can one who has lagged behind reclaim his land by moving forward. He who abandons his position, abandons it permanently.*

Wryly, he reflected that it was this very Law that had impelled him to take a position beside the Ul Caada. And, of course, his neighbors knew the Law as well as he. It was a part of them, a part of their cells even before they split off from their parent. It would be the acme of folly to expect that neighbors like Varsi or Caada would allow him to pass over their land and hold his place in rank.

Bitterness flooded him with a stimulation so piercing that Caada extended a communication filament to project a question. "What is this thing which lies upon your land and mine?" Caada asked. His projection was weak and feeble. It was obvious that he would not last for many more days unless feeding improved.

"I do not know. It is something of metal, and it bars my land. I cannot cross it. It burns me when I touch it."

A quick twinge of excitement rushed along Caada's filament. The old Ul broke the connection instantly, but not before Kworn read the flash of hope that Kworn had kindled. There was no help in this quarter, and the

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wild greed of Varsi was so well known that there was no sense even trying that side.

A surge of hopelessness swept through him. Unless he could find some way to pass this barrier he was doomed.

He didn't want to pass into Emptiness. He had seen too many others go that way to want to follow them. For a moment he thought desperately of begging Caada and Varsi for permission to cross into their land for the short time that would be necessary to pass the barrier, but reason asserted itself. Such an act was certain to draw a flat refusal and, after all, he was the Ul Kworn and he had his pride. He would not beg when begging was useless.

And there was a bare possibility that he might survive if he closed his mantle tightly about him and waited until all the ranks had passed. He could then bring up the rear . . . and, possibly, just possibly, there would be sufficient food left to enable him to reach the winter feeding grounds.

And it might still be possible to cross the disc. There was enough warmth in it to keep him active. By working all night he might be able to build a path of sand across its surface and thus keep his tissues from being seared by the metal. He would be technically violating the law by moving ahead of the others, but if he did not feed ahead, no harm would be done.

HE MOVED closer to the barrier and began to pile sand against its base, sloping it to make a broad ramp to the top of the disc. The work was slow and the sand was slippery. The polished grains slipped away and the ramp crumbled time after time. But he worked on, piling up sand until it reached the top of the disc. He looked across the flat surface that stretched before him.

Fifty raads!

It might as well be fifty zets. He couldn't do it. Already his energy level was so low that he could hardly move, and to build a raad-wide path across this expanse of metal was a task beyond his strength. He drooped across the ramp, utterly exhausted. It was no use. What he ought to do was open his mantle to Emptiness.

He hadn't felt the communication filaments of Caada and Varsi touch him. He had been too busy, but now with Caada's burst of glee, and Varsi's cynical, "A noble decision, Ul Kworn. You should be commended," he realized that they knew everything.

His body rippled hopelessly.

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He was tired, too tired for anger. His energy was low. He contemplated Emptiness impassively. Sooner or later it came to all Folk. He had lived longer than most, and perhaps it was his time to go. He was finished. He accepted the fact with a cold fatalism that he never dreamed he possessed. Lying there on the sand, his mantle spread wide, he waited for the end to come.

It wouldn't come quickly, he thought. He was still far from the cellular disorganization that preceeded extinction. He was merely exhausted, and in need of food to restore his energy.

With food he might still have an outside chance of building the path in time. But there was no food. He had gleaned his area completely before he had ever reached the roadblock.

Lying limp and relaxed on the ramp beside the barrier, he slowly became conscious that the metal wasn't dead. It was alive! Rhythmic vibrations passed through it and were transmitted to his body by the sand.

A wild hope stirred within him. If the metal were alive it might hear him if he tried to communicate. He concentrated his remaining reserves of energy, steeled himself against the pain and pressed a communication filament against the metal.

"Help me!" he projected desperately. "You're blocking my strip! I *can't* pass!"

Off to one side he sensed Varsi's laughter and on the other felt Caada's gloating greed.

"I cannot wake this metal," he thought hopelessly as he tried again, harder than before, ignoring the pain of his burning flesh.

Something clicked sharply within the metal, and the tempo of the sounds changed.

"It's waking!" Kworn thought wildly.

THERE was a creaking noise from above. A rod moved out from the cylinder and twisted into the ground in Varsi's territory, to the accompaniment of clicking, grinding noises. A square grid lifted from the top of the cylinder and began rotating. And Kworn shivered and jerked to the tremendous power of the words that flowed through him. They were words, but they had no meaning, waves of sound that hammered at his receptors in an unknown tongue he could not understand. The language of the Folk had changed since the days of the ancients, he thought despairingly.

And then, with a mantle-shattering roar, the cylinders jutting overhead spouted flame and smoke. Two silvery balls trailing thin, dark filaments shot out of the great cylinder and buried

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themselves in the sand behind him. The filaments lay motionless in the sand as Kworn, wrapped defensively in his mantle, rolled off the ramp to the ground below.

The silence that followed was so deep that it seemed like Emptiness had taken the entire land.

Slowly Kworn loosened his mantle. "In the name of my first ancestor," he murmured shakily, "what was that?" His senses were shocked and disorganized by the violence of the sound. It was worse even than the roar and scream of the samshin that occasionally blew from the south, carrying dust, lichens, feeders and even Folk who had been too slow or too foolish to hide from the fury of the wind.

Gingerly, Kworn inspected the damage to his mantle. It was minor. A tiny rip that could easily be repaired, a few grains of sand that could be extruded. He drew himself together to perform the repairs with the least possible loss of energy, and as he did, he was conscious of an emanation coming from the filaments that had been hurled from the cylinder.

Food!

And such food!

It was the distilled quintessence of a thousand purple feeders! It came to his senses in a shimmering wave of ecstasy so great that his mantle glowed a bright crimson. He stretched a pseudopod toward its source, and as he touched the filament his whole body quivered with anticipation. The barrier was blotted from his thoughts by an orgy of shuddering delight almost too great for flesh to endure. Waves of pleasure ran through his body as he swiftly extended to cover the filament. It could be a trap, he thought, but it made no difference. The demands of his depleted body and the sheer vacuole-constricting delight of this incredible foodstuff made a combination too potent for his will to resist, even if it had desired to do so. Waves of pleasure rippled through him as more of his absorptive surface contacted the filament. He snuggled against it, enfolding it completely, letting the peristaltic rushes sweep through him. He had never fed like this as long as he could recall. His energy levels swelled and pulsed as he sucked the last delight from the cord, and contemplated the further pleasure waiting for him in that other one lying scarcely twenty raads away.

Sensuously, he extended a pseudopod from his upper surface and probed for the other filament. He was filled to the top of his primary vacuole but the desire for more was stronger than ever — despite the fact that he

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knew the food in the other filament would bring him to critical level, would force him to reproduce. The thought amused him. As far back as he could remember, no member of the Folk had ever budded an offspring during the Time of Travel. It would be unheard of, something that would go down through the years in the annals of the Folk, and perhaps even cause a change in the Law.

The pseudopod probed, reached and stopped short of its goal. There was nothing around it but empty air.

FEAR drove the slow orgasmic thoughts from his mind. Absorbed in gluttony, he hadn't noticed that the filament had tightened and was slowly drawing back into the cylinder from whence it came. And now it was too late! He was already over the rim of the metal disc.

Feverishly, he tried to disengage his absorptive surfaces from the filament and crawl down its length to safety, but he couldn't move. He was stuck to the dark cord by some strange adhesive that cemented his cells firmly to the cord. He could not break free.

The line moved steadily upward, dragging him inexorably toward a dark opening in the cylinder overhead. Panic filled him! Desperately he tried to loosen his trapped surfaces. His pseudopod lashed futilely in the air, searching with panic for something to grip, something to clutch that would stop this slow movement to the hell of pain that waited for him in the metal high overhead.

His searching flesh struck another's, and into his mind flooded the Ul Caada's terrified thought. The old one had reacted quicker than he, perhaps because he was poaching, but like himself he was attached and could not break free.

"Serves you right," Kworn projected grimly. "The thing was on my land. You had no right to feed upon it."

"Get me loose!" Caada screamed. His body flopped at the end of a thick mass of digestive tissue, dangling from the line, writhing and struggling in mindless terror. It was strange, Kworn thought, that fear should be so much stronger in the old than in the young.

"Cut loose, you fool," Kworn projected. "There isn't enough of you adhered to hurt if it were lost. A little body substance isn't worth your life. Hurry! You'll be too late if you don't. That metal is poisonous to our flesh."

"But it will be pain to cut my absorbing surface," Caada protested.

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"It will be death if you don't."

"Then why don't you?"

"I can't," Kworn said hopelessly. "All my surface is stuck to the filament. I can't cut free." He was calm now, resigned to the inevitable. His greed had brought him to this. Perhaps it was a fitting punishment. But Caada need not die if he would show courage.

He rotated his eye to watch his struggling neighbor. Apparently Caada was going to take his advice. The tissue below the part of him stuck to the filament began to thin. His pseudopod broke contact. But his movements were slow and hesitant. Already his body mass was rising above the edge of the disc.

"Quick, you fool!" Kworn projected. "Another moment and you're dead!"

But Caada couldn't hear. Slowly his tissues separated as he reluctantly abandoned his absorptive surface. But he was already over the disc. The last cells pinched off and he fell, mantle flapping, full on the surface of the disc. For a moment he lay there quivering, and then his body was blotted from sight by a cloud of frozen steam, and his essence vanished screaming into Emptiness.

KWORN shuddered. It was a terrible way to die. But his own fate would be no better. He wrapped his mantle tightly around him as his leading parts vanished into the dark hole in the cylinder. In a moment he would be following Caada on the journey from which no member of the Folk had ever returned. His body disappeared into the hole.

— and was plunged into paradise!

His foreparts slipped into a warm, thick liquid that loosened the adhesive that bound him to the cord. As he slipped free, he slowly realized that he was not to die. He was bathed in liquid food! He was swimming in it! He was surrounded on all sides by incredible flavors so strange and delicious that his mind could not classify them! The filament had been good, but this — this was indescribable! He relaxed, his mantle spreading through the food, savoring, absorbing, digesting, metabolizing, excreting. His energy levels peaked. The nuclei of his germ plasm swelled, their chromosomes split, and a great bud formed and separated from his body. He had reproduced!

Through a deadening fog of somatic sensation, he realized dully that this was wrong, that the time wasn't right, that the space was limited, and that the natural reaction to abundant food supply was wrong. But for the moment he didn't care.

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For thousands of seasons he had traveled the paths between equator and pole in a ceaseless hunt for food, growing and rejuvenating in good seasons, shrinking and aging in bad. He had been bound to the soil, a slave to the harsh demands of life and Nature. And now the routine was broken.

He luxuriated in his freedom. It must have been like this in the old days, when the waters were plentiful and things grew in them that could be eaten, and the Folk had time to dream young dreams and think young thoughts, and build their thoughts and dreams into the gleaming realities of cities and machines. Those were the days when the mind went above the soil into the air and beyond it to the moons, the sun and the evening stars.

But that was long ago.

He lay quietly, conscious of the change within him as his cells multiplied to replace those he had lost, and his body grew in weight and size. He was rejuvenated. The cells of his growing body, stimulated by the abundance of food, released memories he had forgotten he had ever possessed. His past ran in direct cellular continuity to the dawn of his race, and in him was every memory he had experienced since the beginning. Some were weak, others were stronger, but all were there awaiting an effort of recall. All that was required was enough stimulation to bring them out of hiding.

And for the first time in millennia the stimulus was available. The stimulus was growth, the rapid growth that only an abundant food supply could give, the sort of growth that the shrunken environment outside could not supply. With sudden clarity he saw how the Folk had shrunk in mind and body as they slowly adapted to the ever-increasing rigor of life. The rushing torrent of memory and sensation that swept through him gave him a new awareness of what he had been once and what he had become. His eye was lifted from the dirt and lichens.

WHAT he saw filled him with pity and contempt. Pity for what the Folk had become; contempt for their failure to recognize it. Yet he had been no better than the others. It was only through the accident of this artefact that he had learned. The Folk *couldn't* know what the slow dwindling of their food supply had done to them. Over the millennia they had adapted, changing to fit the changing conditions, surviving only because they were more intelligent and more tenacious than the other forms of life that had become extinct. A thou-

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sand thousand seasons had passed since the great war that had devastated the world. A million years of slow adaptation to the barren waste that had been formed when the ultimate products of Folk technology were loosed on their creators, had created a race tied to a subsistence level of existence, incapable of thinking beyond the basic necessities of life.

The Ul Kworn sighed. It would be better if he would not remember so much. But he could suppress neither the knowledge nor the memories. They crowded in upon him, stimulated by the food in which he floated.

Beside him, his offspring was growing. A bud always grew rapidly in a favorable environment, and this one was ideal. Soon it would be as large as himself. Yet it would never develop beyond an infant. It could not mature without a transfer of germ plasm from other infants of the Folk. And there were no infants.

It would grow and keep on growing because there would be no check of maturity upon its cells. It would remain a partly sentient lump of flesh that would never be complete. And in time it would be dangerous. When it had depleted the food supply it would turn on him in mindless hunger. It wouldn't realize that the Ul Kworn was its father, or if it did, it wouldn't care. An infant is ultimately selfish, and its desires are the most important thing in its restricted universe.

Kworn considered his situation dispassionately.

It was obvious that he must escape from this trap before his offspring destroyed him. Yet he could think of no way to avoid the poison metal. He recognized it now, the element with the twelve protons in its nucleus, a light metal seldom used by the Folk even in the days of their greatness because of its ability to rapidly oxidize and its propensity to burst into brillant flame when heated. With sudden shock he realized that the artefact was nothing less than a gigantic torch!

Why had it been built like this? What was its function? Where had it come from? Why hadn't it spoke since it had released that flood of unintelligible gibberish before it had drawn him inside? Ever since he had entered this food tank it had been quiet except for a clicking, chattering whir that came from somewhere above him. He had the odd impression that it was storing information about him and the way he reacted in the tank.

And then, abruptly, it broke into voice. Cryptic words poured

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from it, piercing him with tiny knives of sound. The intensity and rapidity of the projections shocked him, left him quivering and shaking when they stopped as abruptly as they had begun.

In the quiet that followed, Kworn tried to recall the sequence of the noise. The words were like nothing he had ever heard. They were not the language of the Folk either past or present. And they had a flow and sequence that was not organic. They were mechanical, the product of a metal intelligence that recorded and spoke but did not think. The Folk had machines like that once.

How had it begun? There had been a faint preliminary, an almost soundless voice speaking a single word. Perhaps if he projected it, it would trigger a response. Pitching his voice in the same key and intensity he projected the word as best he could remember it.

And the voice began again.

KWORN quivered with excitement. Something outside the artefact was forcing it to speak. He was certain of it. As certain as he was that the artefact was recording himself and his offspring. But who — or what — was receiving the record? And why?

This could be a fascinating speculation, Kworn thought. But there would be time enough for that later. His immediate need was to get out. Already the food supply was running low, and his offspring was becoming enormous. He'd have to leave soon if he was ever going to. And he'd have to do something about his own growth. Already it was reaching dangerous levels. He was on the ragged edge of another reproduction, and he couldn't afford it.

Regretfully, he began moving the cornified cells of his mantle and his under layer toward his inner surfaces, arranging them in a protective layer around his germ plasm and absorptive cells. There would be enough surface absorption to take care of his maintenance needs, and his body could retain its peak of cellular energy. Yet the desire to feed and bud was almost overpowering. His body screamed at him for denying it the right that food would give it, but Kworn resisted the demands of his flesh until the frantic cellular urges passed.

Beside him his offspring pulsed with physical sensation. Kworn envied it even as he pitied it. The poor mindless thing could be used as a means to the end of his escape, but it was useless for anything else. It was far too large, and far too stupid, to survive in the outside

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world. Kworn extruded a net of hairlike pseudopods and swept the tank in which they lay. It was featureless, save for a hole where the filament had not completely withdrawn when it had pulled him into this place. A few places in the wall had a different texture than the others, probably the sense organs of the recorder. He rippled with satisfaction. There was a grille of poison metal in the top of the tank through which flowed a steady current of warm air. It would be pleasant to investigate this further, Kworn thought, but there was no time. His offspring had seen to that.

He placed his eye on a thin pseudopod and thrust it through the hole in the wall of the tank. It was still night outside, but a faint line of brightness along the horizon indicated the coming of dawn. The artefact glittered icily beneath him, and he had a feeling of giddiness as he looked down the vertiginous drop to the disc below. The dark blotch of Caada's burned body was almost invisible against the faintly gleaming loom of the still-warm disc. Kworn shuddered. Caada hadn't deserved a death like that. Kworn looked down, estimating the chances with his new intelligence, and then slapped a thick communication fibril against his offspring's quivering flesh and hurled a projection at its recoiling mass.

Considering the fact that its cells were direct derivations of his own, Kworn thought grimly, it was surprising how hard it was to establish control. The youngster had developed a surprising amount of individuality in its few xals of free existence. He felt a surge of thankfulness to the old Ul Kworn as the youngster yielded to his firm projection. His precursor had always sought compliant germ plasm to produce what he had called "discipline and order." It was, in fact, weakness. It was detrimental to survival. But right now that weakness was essential.

UNDER the probing lash of his projection the infant extruded a thick mass of tissue that met and interlocked with a similar mass of his own. As soon as the contact firmed, Kworn began flowing toward his eye, which was still in the half-open hole in the side of the tank.

The outside cold struck his sense centers with spicules of ice as he flowed to the outside, clinging to his offspring's gradually extending pseudopod. Slowly he dropped below the cylinder. The infant was frantic. It disliked the cold and struggled to break free, but Kworn clung limpetlike to

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his offspring's flesh as it twisted and writhed in an effort to return to the warmth and comfort into which it was born.

"Let go!" his offspring screamed. "I don't like this place."

"In a moment," Kworn said as he turned the vague writhings into a swinging pendulum motion. "Help me move back and forth."

"I can't. I'm cold. I hurt. Let me go!"

"Help me," Kworn ordered grimly, "or hang out here and freeze."

His offspring shuddered and twitched. The momentum of the swing increased. Kworn tightened his grip.

"You promised to let go!" his offspring wailed. "You prom—"

The infant's projection was cut off as Kworn loosed himself at the upward arc of the swing, spread his mantle and plummeted toward the ground. Fear swept through him as his body curved through the thin air, missing the edge of the disc and landing on the ground with a sense-jarring thud. Behind and above him up against the cylinder, the thick tendril of his offspring's flesh withdrew quickly from sight. For a moment the Ul Kworn's gaze remained riveted on the row of odd markings on the metal surface, and then he turned his attention to life.

There was no reason to waste the pain of regret upon that half sentient mass of tissue that was his offspring. The stupid flesh of his flesh would remain happy in the darkness with the dwindling food until its flesh grew great enough to touch the poison metal in the ceiling of the tank.

And then —

With a harsh projection of horror, the Ul Kworn moved, circling the artefact on Caada's vacated strip. And as he moved he concentrated energy into his high-level communication organs, and projected a warning of danger.

"Move!" he screamed. "Move forward for your lives!"

The line rippled. Reddish mantles unfolded as the Folk reacted. The nearest, shocked from estivation, were in motion even before they came to full awareness. Alarms like this weren't given without reason.

Varsi's reaction, Kworn noted, was faster than any of his fellows. The young Ul had some favorable self-preservation characteristics. He'd have to consider sharing some germ plasm with him at the next reproduction season, after all.

In a giant arc, the Folk pressed forward under the white glow of emerging dawn. Behind them the artefact began to project again in its strange tongue. But in mid-cry it stopped abruptly. And

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from it came a wail of mindless agony that tore at Kworn's mind with regret more bitter because nothing could be done about it.

His offspring had touched the poison metal.

Kworn turned his eye backwards. The artefact was shaking on its broad base from the violence of his offspring's tortured writhings. As he watched a brilliant burst of light flared from its top. Heat swept across the land, searing the lichens and a scattered few of the Folk too slow to escape. The giant structure burned with a light more brilliant than the sun and left behind a great cloud of white vapor that hung on the air like the menacing cloud of a samshin. Beneath the cloud the land was bare save for a few twisted pieces of smoking metal.

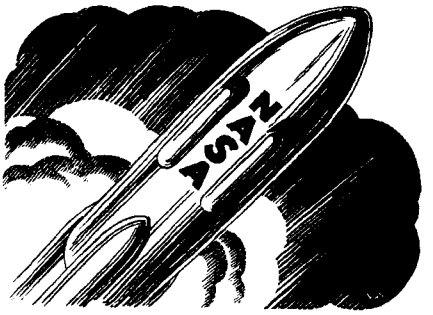
The roadblock was gone.

KWORN moved slowly forward, gleaning Caada's strip and half of his own which he shared with Varsi.

He would need that young Ul in the future. It was well to place him under an obligation. The new thoughts and old memories weren't dying. They remained, and were focused upon the idea of living better than at this subsistence level. It should be possible to grow lichens, and breed a more prolific type of lichen feeder. Water channeled from the canals would stimulate lichen growth a thousand-fold. And with a more abundant food supply, perhaps some of the Folk could be stimulated to think and apply ancient buried skills to circumvent Nature.

It was theoretically possible. The new breed would have to be like Varsi, tough, driving and selfishly independent. In time they might inherit the world. Civilization could arise again. It was not impossible.

His thoughts turned briefly back to the artefact. It still bothered him. He still knew far too little about it. It was a fascinating speculation to dream of what it might have been. At any rate, one thing was sure. It was not a structure of his race. If nothing else, those cabalistic markings on the side of the cylinder were utterly alien.



Thoughtfully he traced them in the sand. What did they mean?

— J. F. BONE

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GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

OF THE many science-fiction authors of some thirty years ago only a tiny group is still active today. One of the real giants of the day was Jack Williamson, a special favorite of mine. Exactly three decades ago, I compiled a personal checklist of his works, up to and including his latest, "The Stone from the Green Star" (how many of you remember *that* one?) and discovered, with no surprise at all, that I had read every one.

However, he had his greatest productive period still ahead of him. He had yet to write what must rank as his greatest popular successes: *The Legion of Space*, *The Cometeers* and *The Legion of Time.*

Although these are space operas in the heroic mold, Williamson was never more than the light-heavyweight king as compared to the co-holders of the super-dreadnaught class, "Doc" Smith and John W. Campbell, Jr. The old stories don't stand the difficult re-reading test too well; but it is very much to Williamson's credit that he has been able to make the exceedingly difficult adjustment of style and

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approach to the modern manner.

THE TRIAL OF TERRA by Jack Williamson. Ace.

His latest book exemplifies vividly the good and bad sides of Williamson's writing. Originally a group of shorter stories, they have been bound, unwisely, I think, into novel form by means of a most awkward as well as most indigestible central theme.

Earth is under surveillance by an interstellar civilization that will determine whether Mankind is truly human and thus entitled to join the federation as an equal, or to be destroyed in the conversion of Sol into a navigational marker beacon. So far this is old hat, Williamson being the umpty-umpth writer with this plot. What won't stay down, however, is his premise that his intragalactic civilization can function despite the Einsteinian limitations the plot places upon communication and travel.

Terra's judge, whose decision is the sole determinant of Earth's fate, voyages fifty years, objective time, to sit in judgment because Man is about to make Contact.

A Prince of a matriarchy takes a short interstellar trip while his infant fiancee ripens into maturity.

Intriguing, no doubt, but the imagination boggles at the insurmountable problems of conducting the business of any civilization under such impossible disjointments.

The individual stories, fortunately, are themselves good, standing out like sparkling gems in a tarnished setting. As individual novelettes they cannot be denied their well-deserved

Rating: ***½

I remember well my first introduction to the work of "World Wrecker" Edmond Hamilton. Although almost nothing of the story remains with me, the impact of the old *Amazing Quarterly* cover does (How long ago, thirty-three years?) with its turtle people, its predominantly yellow background and the magic of its title, *The Other Side of the Moon*. Hamilton, a prolific writer, knew his market well and wrote stories that sold. Certainly no one suspected that in the breast of the author of countless Capt. Future yarns beat a desire to write realism. (See last month's Five Star Shelf. *What's It Like Out There*, penned in the middle Thirties, earned horrified rejection slips and didn't see publication until the field finally caught up with it many years later.)

THE HAUNTED STARS by Edmond Hamilton. Pyramid.

This paperback reprint of a

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recent hard cover novel is an excellent example of Hamilton's metamorphosis from purveyor of commercial-type space opera to sensitive portrayer of recognizable people in strange situations and environments.

The Hamilton and Williamson yarns make for interesting contrast. Where Williamson sees Earth as the long-forgotten cradle of Mankind, Hamilton visualizes Man as the foster-child of Foster-Mother Earth, abandoned descendant of an interstellar empire that was wiped from the spaceways some thirty thousand years ago as aftermath of a cataclysmic war with another species.

The plot concerns the discovery of the thirty thousand year old wreckage of a star-ship on the Moon, decipherment of the ancient language and the building of a ship secret from the Russians. Hamilton then sends his somewhat less-than-shining heroes in search of our lost heritage on the Home World.

The most noticeable feature of Hamilton's turnabout is the fact that almost all conflict stems from antagonisms within the exploratory group rather than from the machinations of the mysterious aliens, and this despite the fact that Hamilton has imbued them with powers even beyond those of his halcyon days of cosmic demolition.

Hamilton was extra careful with his story ending and you should be, to. It's loaded.

Rating: ****½

MARS IS MY DESTINATION by Frank Belknap Long. Pyramid.

Although Long's span of productivity is equal to that of the others under discussion, he was never a writer of the Big Story. His output was limited mainly to shorts and novelettes of which none were memorable like those of Stanley G. Weinbaum, the early Heinleins, the first van Vogts or the Campbell — Don A. Stuart stunners, even though he maintained a high standard of workmanship.

However, in this novel, a transplanted Western, Long's hero is pinned with the silver wings (sheriff's badge) of the supreme law officer and brought to Mars to quell the bitter internecine warfare between two huge power combines (big-time ranching and homesteading). His method of defusing this explosive situation is to beat up the Bad Guy who heads one of the combines, aided by the Semi-Good Guy who heads up the other.

The only two things that differentiate this from a standard Western are the wearing of a dark uniform by the hero and the "stream of consciousness"

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GALAXY MAGAZINE, published Bi-Monthly at New York, N. Y. for October 1, 1962.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: *Publisher*, Sol Cohen, 421 Hudson St., New York 14, N. Y.: *Editor*, Frederik Pohl, 421 Hudson St., New York 14, N. Y.; *Managing Editor*, None; *Business Manager*, None.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was 92,000 (This information is required by the act of June 11, 1960 to be included in all statements regardless of frequency of issue.)

ROBERT M. GUINN, *Owner*

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 26 day of September, 1962

Jacques N. Glick, Notary Public (Commission expires March 30, 1963)

treatment that enables us to look inside him. He is beset by innumerable fears and human frailties but he jabbers so incessantly in run-on washerwoman fashion about them that one almost wishes that he come out second best in his solution to his problems.

Rating **

THE HUGO WINNERS edited by Isaac Asimov. Doubleday.

The amazing durability of some of these should-be crotchety old-timers is wonderfully illustrated by Asimov's collection of prize-winning stories chosen as best of their class at several recent World Science Fiction Conventions.

Murray Leinster has been a household name in SF circles for so long that it almost seems as if "Will F. Jenkins" is his pseudonym instead of the other way around. It is hard to realize that his story *The Runaway Skyscraper* appeared in June, 1926, issue number three of *Amazing Stories*, the grandpappy of all SF mags. And it's therefore doubly astonishing that he should be able to adapt to the considerable change in the genre so successfully that his novelette, *Colonial Survey*, should waltz off with top honors. (On sober second thought, though, one remembers that his novella *Sidewise in Time* opened

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a whole new subdivision for exploit back in 1934.)

Another umpty-genarian who is still knocking out topnotch stories is Clifford Simak who, although not as ancient as Leinster, first saw print in the old *Wonder Stories* with *World of the Red Sun.* Aside from such memorable novels as *Time Quarry, Ring Around the Sun* and the haunting "City" series, Simak has produced a number of puzzle stories that are as intriguing as anything being written. A prime example is his prize-winner, *The Big Back Yard.*

This is a sure-fire collection of Can't Misses. Nine prize-winning stories selected by vote as best-of-the-year have to be something extra special, an anthologist's dream of Paradise. Lucky-stiff Asimov crows about his good fortune in some delightful comments that further enliven a delightful book.

Younger authors represented: A. Clarke, W. M. Miller, Jr., E. F. Russell, A. Davidson, R. Block, D. Keyes, P. Anderson.

Rating: (what else?) *****

To return to the incredible Mr. Leinster; for a chiller-thriller session, try *The Forgotten Planet* (Ace) on for size. Based on *Mad Planet* and *Red Dust* that first appeared in the *Amazing Stories* in 1926 and 1927, it's quite a reading experience.

ALL THE TRAPS OF EARTH by Clifford D. Simak. Doubleday.

Coming back to Old Man Simak, here is an excellently representative volume of his work in short story and novelette length. The plots vary from a time travel project, *Project Mastodon,* to the sales resistance encountered on Garson IV by a joint robot and human sales team from Central Trading in *Installment Plan.* Or from the hunting of a deadly alien in a typical Midwestern town in *Good Night, Mr. James* to the equally deadly, but completely innocuous seeming alien life encountered by an exploratory team in *Drop Dead.*

But, whatever the motivations, Simak's humans, robots and androids are just plain folks, completely credible and interesting. So are the stories and long may Simak wave.

Rating ****½

—FLOYD C. GALE

Have you seen the new **Worlds of Tomorrow?** First big issue contains Arthur C. Clarke, Keith Laumer, Murray Leinster, Robert Silverberg, etc. Don't miss it! On sale now.

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VOYAGE TO FAR N'JURD

They would never live to see the trip's end. So they made a few changes in their way of life — and many in their way of death!

By KRIS NEVILLE
Illustrated by MACK

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I

"I DON'T see why we have to be here," a crewman said. "He ain't liable to say anything."

"He shore better," the man in front of him said loudly.

"Be still," his wife said. "People's lookin' at ya."

"I don't care a smidgen," he said, "if en they ayre."

"Please," she said.

"Joanne Marie," he said, "you know that when I aims ta do somethin', I'm jest natcher'lly bound to do hit. An' iffen I aims ta talk . . ."

"Here comes the priest. Now, be still."

The man looked up. "So he do; an' I'll tell ya, hit shore is time he's a-gittin' hyere. I ain't got no all night fer ta sit."

The crewman to his left bent over and whispered, "I'll bet he's gonna tell us it's gonna be another postponement."

"Iffen he does, I'm jest a-gonna stand up an' yell right out that I ain't gonna stand fer hit no longer."

"Now, dear," said Joanne Marie, "the captain can hear ya, if you're gonna talk so loud."

"I hope he does; I jest hope he does. He's th' one that's a-keepin' us all from our Reward, an' I jest hope he does heyar me, so he'll know I'm a-gittin' mighty tyird uv waitin'."

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"You tell 'im!" someone said from two rows behind him.

THE captain, in the officer's section, sat very straight and tall. He was studiously ignoring the crew. This confined his field of vision to the left half of the recreation area. While the priest stood before the speaker's rostrum waiting for silence, the captain reached back with great dignity and scratched his right shoulderblade.

Nestir, the priest, was dressed out in the full ceremonial costume of office. His high, strapless boots glistened with polish. His fez perched jauntily on his shiny, shaven head. The baldness was symbolic of diligent mental application to abstruse points of doctrine. *Cotian exentiati pablum re overum est:* "Grass grows not in the middle of a busy thoroughfare." The baldness was the result of the diligent application of an effective depilatory. His blood-red cloak had been freshly cleaned for the occasion, and it rustled around him in silky sibilants.

"Men," he said. And then, more loudly, "Men!"

The hiss and sputter of conversation guttered away.

"Men," he said.

"The other evening," he said, "— Gelday it was, to be exact— one of the crew came to me with a complaint."

"Well, I'll be damned," Joanne Marie's husband said loudly.

Nestir cleared his throat. "It was about the Casting Off. That's why I called you all together today." He stared away, at a point over the head and to the rear of the audience.

"It puts me in mind of the parable of the six Vergios."

Joanne Marie's husband sighed deeply.

"Three, you will recall, were wise. When Prophet was at Meizque, they came to him and said, 'Prophet, we are afflicted. We have great sores upon our bodies.' The Prophet looked at them and did see that it *was* true. Then he blessed them and took out His knife and lay open their sores. For which the three wise Vergios were passing grateful. And within the last week, they were dead of infection. But three were foolish and hid their sores; and these three did live."

The captain rubbed his nose.

"Calex i pundendem hoy, my children. 'Secrecy makes for a long life,' as it says in the *Jarcon.*" Nestir tugged behind him at his cloak.

"I want you all to remember that little story. I want you all to take it away from here with you and think about it, tonight, in the privacy of your cabins.

"And like the three wise Vergios who went to the Prophet,

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one of the crewmen came to me. He came to me, and he said: 'Father, I am weary of sailing.'

"Yes, he said, 'I am weary of sailing.'

"Now, don't you think I don't know that. Every one of you — every blessed one of you — is weary of sailing. I know that as well as I know my own name, yes.

"But because he came to me and said, 'Father, I am weary of sailing,' I went to the captain, and I said, 'Captain, the men are weary of sailing.'

"And then the captain said: 'All right, Father,' he said, 'I will set the day for the Festival of the Casting Off!' "

THE little fellow was pleased by the rustle of approval from the audience. "God damn, hit's about time!" Joanne Marie's husband said.

Nestir cleared his throat again.

"Hummm. Uh. And the day is not very far distant," said Nestir.

"I knowed there was a catch to hit," Joanne Marie's husband said.

"I know you will have many questions; yes, I know you will have — ah, ah — well, many questions. You are thinking: 'What kind of a Festival can we have here on this ship?' You are thinking: 'What a fine thing — ah, what a good thing, that is — ah, how nice it would be to have the Casting Off at home, among friends.' "

Nestir waved his hands. "Well, I just want to tell you: I come from Koltah. And you know that Koltah never let any city state outdo her in a Festival, uh-huh.

"The arena in Koltah is the greatest arena in the whole system. We have as many as sixty thousand accepted applicants. All of them together in the arena is a — uh, uh, well — a sight to behold. People come from all over to behold it. I never will forget the Festival at which my father was accepted. He . . .

"Well, the point I want to make is this: I just wanted to tell you that I know what a Festival should be, and the captain and I will do everything in our power to make our Casting Off as wonderful as any anywhere.

"And I want to tell you that if you'll come to me with your suggestions, I'll do all I can to see that we do this thing just the way you want it done. I want you to be proud of this Casting Off Festival, so you can look back on it and say, uh, uh — this day was the real high point of your whole life!"

Everyone but Joanne Marie's husband cheered. He sat glumly muttering to himself.

Nestir bobbed his shiny head at them and beamed his cherubic smile. And noticed that there was

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a little blonde, one of the crewmen's wives, in the front row that had very cute ankles.

While they were still cheering and stomping and otherwise expressing their enthusiasm and approval, Nestir walked off the speaker's platform and into the officer's corridor. He wiped his forehead indecorously on the hem of his cloak and felt quite relieved that the announcement was over with and the public speaking done.

II

DINNER that evening was a gala occasion aboard the ship. The steward ordered the holiday feast prepared in celebration of Nestir's announcement. And, for the officers, he broke out of the special cellar the last case allotment for Crew One of the delicate Colta Barauche ('94). He ordered the messman to put a bottle of it to the right of each plate.

The captain came down from his stateroom after the meal had begun. He nodded curtly to the officers when he entered the mess hall, walked directly to his place at the head of the table, sat down and morosely began to work the cork out of his wine bottle with his teeth.

"You'll spoil the flavor, shaking it that way," the third mate cautioned. He was particularly fond of that year.

The captain twisted the bottle savagely, and the cork came free with a little pop. He removed the cork from between his teeth, placed it very carefully beside his fork, and poured himself a full glass of the wine.

"Very probably," he said sadly.

"I don't think hit'll do hit," the first mate said. "He hain't shook hard enough to matter."

The captain picked up the glass, brought it toward his lips — then, suddenly having thought of something, he put it back down and turned to Nestir.

"I say. Have you decided on this Carstar thing yet, Father?"

The little priest looked up. He laid his knife across the rim of his plate. "It has ramifications," he said.

When the third mate saw that his opinion on the wine was not immediately to be justified, he settled back in his chair with a little sigh of disapproval.

"Well, what do you *think* your decision will be, Father?" the steward asked.

Nestir picked up his knife and fork and cut off a piece of meat. "Hummmm," he said. "It's hard to say. The whole issue involves, as a core point, the principle of *casta cum mae stotiti.*"

The first mate nodded sagely.

"The intent, of course, could

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actually be — ah — *sub mailloux;* and in that event, naturally, the decision would be even more difficult. I wish I could talk to higher authority about it; but of course I haven't the time. I'll have to decide something."

"HE had a very pretty wife," the third mate said.

"Yes, very." Nestir agreed. "But as I was saying, if it could be proven that the culstem fell due to no negligence on his part, either consciously or subconsciously, then the obvious conclusion would be that no stigma would be attached." He speared his meat and chewed it thoughtfully.

"But it wasn't at all bloody," the wife of the second mate said. "I scarcely think he felt it at all. It happened too fast."

Nestir swallowed the mouthful of food and washed it down with a gulp of wine.

"The problem, my dear Helen," he said, "is one of intent. To raise the issue of concomitant agonies is to confuse the whole matter. For instance. Take Wilson, in my home state of Koltah. Certainly *he* died as miserable a death as anyone could desire."

"Yes," said the second mate's wife. "I remember that. I read about it in the newspapers."

"But it was a case of obvious *intent,*" continued Nestir, "and therefore constituted a clear out attempt to avoid his duty by hastening to his Reward."

Upon hearing the word duty, the captain brightened.

"That," he said to Nestir, "my dear Father, is the cardinal point of the whole game, y'know." He scratched the back of his left hand. "Duty. And I must say, I think you're being quite shortsighted about the Casting Off date. After all, it's not only a question of *how* we go, but also a question of leaving only after having done our duty. And that's equally important."

"The Synod of Cathau—" Nestir began.

"Plague take it, Father! Really, now, I must say. The Synod Cathau! Certainly you've misinterpreted that. Anticipation can be a joy, y'know: almost equal to the very Reward. Anticipation should spur man in duty. It's all noble and self sacrificing." He scratched the back of his right hand.

The second mate had been trying to get a word in edgewise for several minutes; he finally succeeded by utilizing the temporary silence following the captain's outburst.

"You don't need to worry about *your* Casting Off, Captain. You can leave that to me. I assure you, I have in mind a most ingenious method."

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THE captain was not visibly cheered; he was still brooding about the sad absence of a sense of duty on the part of Nestir. "I will welcome it," he said, "at the proper time, sir. And I certainly hope—" His eyes swept the table. "I *certainly* hope to be Cast Off by an officer. It would be very humiliating, y'know, to have a crew member do it."

"Oh, very," said the steward.

"I don't know," the second mate's wife said, "whether you better count on my husband or not. I have my own plans for him."

"This problem of Carstar interests me," the third mate said. "Did I ever tell you about my wife? She strangled our second baby."

"He was a very annoying child," his wife said.

"He probably wouldn't have lived, anyway," the third mate said. "Puny baby."

"That," said Nestir, "is not at all like the Carstar case. Not at all. Yours is a question of *saliex y cuminzund*."

The first mate nodded.

"It seems to me that the whole thing would depend on the intent of the strangler."

"Captain," the steward said, "you really must let me give you some of that salve."

"That's very kind of you, but I . . . "

"No bother at all," the steward said.

"As I see it," Nestir said, "if the intent was the natural maternal instinct of the mother to release her child from its duty, then . . ."

"Oh, not at all," the third mate's wife said. "I did it to make him stop crying."

"Well, in that case, I see no reason why he shouldn't get his Reward."

"I certainly hope so," the third mate said. "Jane worries about it all the time."

"I do not," Jane contradicted.

"Now, honey, you know you do so."

At that moment, he lost interest in his wife and leaned across the table toward the captain, "Well?" he asked.

The captain rolled the wine over his tongue. "You were right, of course."

The third mate turned triumphantly to the first mate. "There, I told you so."

The first mate shrugged. "I never do say nothin' right," he said. "I hain't got no luck. I've spent more years un all ya, carpenterin' up a duty log that's better un even th' captain's. An' hit's Martha an' me that gotta wait an' help th' next crew. Lord above knows how long time hit'll be afore we uns'll got ta have a Festival."

"Oh, really, now. Now. Duty,

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duty," the captain reprimanded him mildly.

"Duty! Duty! Duty! You all ur in a conspiracy. You all want me ta die uv old age."

"Nonsense," said the steward. "We don't want anything of the sort. After all, someone has to orient the new crew."

"Quite right," said the captain. "You ought to be proud."

THE first mate slammed his napkin in the middle of his food and stalked out of the mess hall.

"Quite touchy today," Nestir observed.

"By the way," the third mate said. "Wanda gave me a petition to give to you, Father."

"Wanda?"

"Yes. She's sixteen, now."

"Wanda who?" the steward asked.

"Wanda Miller, the bosun's daughter."

"I know her," Helen said.

"She's the oldest child on the ship, and she wants you to sign her adult petition so she can be in the Festival, Father."

"She's so young . . ."

"Sixteen, Father."

"After all, one must have done some duty," the captain said.

"He wants you to sign it so he can take her in the Changing of the Wives," Jane said.

Nestir fidgeted uncomfortably.

"Well, I'll look at her record," he said.

"It's an idea," the second mate said. "Otherwise, we'll be short one woman."

"There wouldn't be one short if *he* had brought a wife," the first mate's wife said, looking squarely at the captain.

"Now, Martha. I place duty above pleasure. You're just angry, y'know, because you have to stay with your husband."

"All right, so I am. But it's true. And if Carstar hadn't been killed, there would have been two short." She shot a wicked glance at Nestir. "Why don't you and him share a woman—"

"Martha!"

"Although the Prophet knows what woman in her right mind would consent to . . . "

"Well," said Nestir hesitantly.

"Listen," the third mate said, "the second's right. If you don't sign it, someone will have to do without a woman."

Nestir blushed. "I'll look it over very carefully, but you must realize that the priestcraft . . ."

"Actually, in a way, it would be her duty to, you see. Think of it like that: as her way to do her duty."

"She's too young for you, dear," Jane said to her husband.

"Oh, I don't know," the steward said. "Sometimes they're the best, I hear."

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III

THE third mate, whose name was Harry, stood before the mirror combing his hair. He had been combing his hair for the last fifteen minutes.

"I suppose the crew is celebrating?" his wife said.

"I suppose."

She stood up and walked over to the dresser. Absently she began to finger the articles on it.

"You really shouldn't have told them about little Glenn tonight."

"Pish-tush."

"No, Harry. I mean it. Helen looked at me strangely all through dinner. She has three children, you know."

"You're imagining things."

"But she *does* have three children."

"I mean about her looking at you."

"Oh."

Harry fiddled with his tie without speaking.

"I mean, as much as to say: 'Well, I raised all of mine.' "

"But honey, about little Glenn. That was an accident, almost. You didn't really mean to choke him that hard."

"But still . . . it . . . I mean, there was Helen, looking at me like I wasn't doing my duty. You know."

"No," he said. "That's nonsense, Jane. Sheer nonsense. You know what the priest said."

He polished one of his brass buttons with the sleeve of his coat.

"Harry?"

"Yes?"

"I don't think all that is necessary just to go on duty."

"Probably not."

She walked to the bed and sat down. "Harry?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Don't you really think she's awful young?"

"Huh-uh."

"I mean, why don't you pick someone else? Like Mary? She's awful sweet. I'll bet she'd be better."

"Probably."

"She's a lot of fun."

He brushed at his hair again. "Who do you want, Jane?"

"Oh, I don't know." She looked down at her legs, raised them up from the floor and held them out in front of her. "I think I'd kind of like Nestir. With his funny bald head. I hope he asks me."

"I'll mention it to him."

"Would you really, Harry? That would be sweet."

"Sure, honey." He looked down at his watch.

"Harry? Are you going to meet Wanda in the control room?"

"Uh-huh."

"I thought so. Well, remember this, dear: It isn't the day of the

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Changing of the Wives yet. Don't forget."

"Honey! You don't think for a minute that. . . ."

"No, dear. I know you wouldn't. But just *don't*, I mean."

HE walked over and kissed her forehead and patted her cheek. "Course not," he said, comfortingly.

He left her sitting on the bed and strolled down the officers' corridor, whistling.

He made a mental note to have the bosun send some of the crew in tomorrow to wash down these bulkheads. They needed it. In one corner a spider spun its silver web.

He jogged up the companionway, turned left and felt the air as fresh as spring when he stepped under the great ventilator.

And beneath it lay one of the crew.

He kicked the man several times in the ribs until he came to consciousness.

"Can't sleep here, my man," Harry explained.

"Awww. Go way an' le' me 'lone, huh?"

"Here. Here." He pulled the fellow erect and slapped him in the face briskly. "This is the officers' corridor."

"Oh? Ish it? Schorry. Shore schorry, shir. So schorry."

Harry assisted him to the crew's corridor where he sank to the floor and relapsed once more into a profound slumber.

Harry continued on to the control room.

When he entered it, the second mate was yawning.

"Hi, John. Sleepy?"

"Uh-huh. You're early."

"Don't mind, do you?"

"No . . . Quiet tonight. Had to cut the motors an hour ago. Control technician passed out."

"Oh?"

The second mate took out a cigarette and lit it. "Can't blow the ship up, you know. Look like hell on the record. Hope the captain don't find out about it, though. He'll figure the man was neglecting his duty."

He blew a smoke ring.

"Might even bar him from the Festival."

"Yeah," said Harry, "the captain's funny that way."

The second mate blew another smoke ring.

"Well," Harry said.

"Uh. Harry? Are you really going to take that Wanda girl?"

"If Nestir lets me."

"Say. Harry. Do you suppose your wife would . . .?"

HARRY crossed to the second mate and put a hand on his shoulder. "Sorry, old fellow. She's got it in her head to take Nestir." He shrugged. "I don't exactly ap-

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prove, of course, but . . . I'm sure if he doesn't want her, she'd be glad to hear your offer."

"Aw, that's all right," John said. "Don't really matter. Say. By the way. Have I told you what I intend to do to the captain? I've got it all thought out. You know that saber I picked up on Queglat? Well . . ."

"Look. How about telling me another time?"

"Uh, Sure. If you say so. Uh?"

"I'm kind of expecting Wanda."

"Oh. Sure. I should have known you weren't here early for nothing. In that case, I better be shoving off. Luck."

"Thanks. See you at breakfast."

"Right-o."

After the second mate left, Harry walked over to the control panel. The jet lights were dead. He picked up the intercom and switched over the engine call bell. "'Lo," he said into the microphone. "This is the bridge . . . Oh, hi, Barney. Harry . . . Have you got a sober control technician down there yet? . . . Fine. We'll start the jets again. If the captain comes in now — well, you know how he is . . . Okay, thanks. Night."

He replaced the microphone. He reached over and threw the forward firing lever. The jet lights came on and the ship began to brake acceleration again.

Having done that, he switched on the space viewer. The steady buzz of the equipment warming sounded in his ears. Wanda would be sure to want to look at the stars. She was simple minded.

"Hello."

He swiveled around. "Oh, hello, Wanda, honey."

"Hello, Haireee. Are you glad little ol' me could come, huh?"

"Sure am."

"Me, too. Can I look at the — oh. It's already on."

"Uh-huh. Look. Wanda."

"Hum?"

"I talked to Nestir today."

"Goody. What did he say, huh? I can be an adult and get to play in the Festival, can I?"

"I don't know, yet. He's thinking about it. That's why I want to see you. He's going to check your record. And Wanda?"

"Them stars shore are purty."

"Wanda, listen to me."

"I'm a-listenin', Haireee."

"You're simply going to have to stop carrying that doll around with you if you want to be an adult."

IN Nestir's cabin the next morning, the captain and the priest held a conference.

"No, Captain. I'm afraid I can't agree to that," Nestir said.

The captain said, "Oh, don't be unreasonable, Father. After all, this is a ship, y'know. And I am, after all, the captain."

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Nestir shook his head. "The crew and the officers will participate together in the Festival. I will not put the officers' corridor off limits, and — Oh! Yes? Come in!"

The door opened. "Father?"

"Yes, my son? Come in."

"Thank you, Father. Good morning, Captain, sir."

"Sit down, my son. Now, Captain, as I was saying: no segregation. It's contrary to the spirit, if not the wording, of the *Jarcon*."

"But Father! A crewman! In the officers' corridor! Think!"

"Before the Prophet, we are all equal. I'm sorry, Captain. Now on Koltah, we practiced it with very good results, and . . ."

"I say, really—"

"Father?" said the crewman who had just entered.

"Yes, my son. In one moment. Now, Captain. As I have been explaining: The arena method has advantages. In Koltah we always used it. But here — due to the — ah — exigencies of deep space — I feel convinced that a departure from normal procedure is warranted. It is not without precedent. Such things were fairly common, *in astoli tavoro,* up until centralization, three hundred years before Allth. Indeed, in my home city — Koltah — in the year of the seventh plague, a most unusual expedient was adopted. It seems . . ."

"You're perfectly correct, of course," the captain said.

"That's just what I wanted to see you about, Father," the crewman said. "Now, in my city state of Xi, for the Festivals, we . . ."

"Shut up," said the captain softly.

"Yes, sir."

"Now, as I was saying, Captain, when the methods used in . . ."

"If you'll excuse me, Father, I really should return to duty," said the crewman.

"Quite all right, my son. Close the door after you."

"I must say, fellow, your sense of duty is commendable."

"Well, uh, thank you, sir. And thank you, Father, for your time."

"Quite all right, my son. That's what I'm here for. Come in as often as you like."

The crewman closed the door after him.

HE had been gone only a moment, scarcely time for Nestir to get properly launched on his account, when Harry, the third mate, knocked on the door and was admitted.

"Oh? Good morning, Captain. I didn't know you were here." Then, to the priest: "I'll come back later, Father."

"Nonsense," said the captain. "Come in."

"Well, I had hoped to to see

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the Father for a minute on . . . private business."

"I have to be toddling along," said the captain.

"But Captain! I haven't finished telling you about. . . ."

"I'll just go down and get a cup of coffee," the captain said.

"I'll call you when I'm through," said Harry.

The captain left the room.

"It's about Wanda, Father," said the third mate.

The priest studied the table top. He rearranged some papers. "Ah, yes. The young girl."

"Well, I mean, it's not only about Wanda," said Harry. "You see, my wife, Jane, that is . . ."

"Yes?" said the priest. He took his pen out of the holder.

"I think, with the proper . . . ah . . . you know. What I mean is, I think she might look with favor on you in the Changing of the Wives, if I said a few well chosen words in your behalf."

"That is very flattering, my son." He returned the pen to the holder. "Such bounty, as it says in the *Jarcon*, is *cull tensio*."

"And with your permission, Father . . . "

"Ah . . ."

"She's a very pretty woman."

"Ah . . . Quite so."

"Well, about Wanda. I really shouldn't mention this. But Father, if we *are* short one woman . . ."

"Hummmm."

"I mean, the girls might think a man gets rusty."

"I see what you mean." Nestir blinked his eyes. "It wouldn't be fair, all things considered."

He stood up.

"I may tell you, my son, that, in thinking this matter over last night, I decided that Wanda—ah—Miller, yes, has had sufficient duty to merit participation in the Festival."

"Justice is a priestly virtue," Harry said.

"And you really think your wife would . . .?"

"Oh, yes, Father."

"Well, ahem. But . . ."

"Yes, Father?"

"*Ad dulce verboten.*"

"Uh?"

"That is to say, in order for a woman to join in the ritual of the Changing of the Wives, she must, ahem, be married."

"I never thought of that," said the third mate disconsolately.

"I think that can be arranged, however," said Nestir. "If you go by the mess hall on your way out, please tell the captain we can continue our discussion at his pleasure."

IV

"SIT down, Captain," said Nestir, when the captain entered. "No. Over there, in the

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comfortable chair. There. Are you comfortable, Captain?"

"Of course I am."

"Good. I have a question to ask you, Captain."

"I say?"

Nestir rubbed his bald head. "Sir," he said by way of preamble, "I know you have the greatest sensibility in questions of duty."

"That's quite so, y'know. I pride myself upon it, if I do say so."

"Exactly. *Argot y calpex*. No sacrifice is too great."

"True; true."

"Well, then, say the first day of Wenslaus, that would be — ah, a Zentahday — I may depend upon you to wed Wanda Miller, the bosun's daughter, yes?"

"No," said the captain.

"Come now, sir. I realize she is the daughter of a crewman, but—"

"Father," said the captain, "did I ever tell you about the time I led an expeditionary force against Zelthalta?"

"I don't believe you have."

"Then I will tell you. Came about this way. I was given command of fifty-three thousand Barains. Savage devils. Uncivilized, but fine fighters. I was to march them ninety-seven miles across the desert that . . . "

"Captain! I fear I must be very severe with you. I will be forced to announce in the mess hall this evening that you have refused to do your duty when it was plainly and properly called to your attention."

"Very well, Father," the captain said after several minutes. "I will do it."

He was trembling slightly.

THAT morning was to be the time of the captain's wedding. He had insisted that it be done in privacy. For the ceremony, he refused to make the slightest change in his everyday uniform; nor would he consent to Nestir's suggestion that he carry a nosegay of hydroponic flowers. He had intended, after the ceremony, to go about his duty as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened; but after it was done with, the vast indignity of it came home to him even more poignantly than he had imagined it would.

Without a word, he left the priest's stateroom and walked slowly, ponderously, with great dignity, to his own.

It was a very fine stateroom. The finest, but for Nestir's, in the whole ship. The velvet and gold drapes (his single esthetic joy) were scented with exotic perfume. The carpet was an inch and a half thick.

He walked through his office without breaking his stride.

The bed was large and fluffy. An unbroken expanse of white

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coverlette jutting out from the far bulkhead. It looked as soft as feather down.

Without even a sigh, he threw himself upon the bed and lay very, very quiet. His left leg was suspended in the air, intersecting, at the thigh, the plane of the coverlet at forty-five degrees; the number of degrees remained stiffly, unrelaxingly forty-five.

Only after a long, long time did he roll over on his back and then it was merely to stare fixedly at the ceiling.

It is entirely possible that he would have lain there until Doomsday had not his introspection been, around noon, interrupted by an apologetic tap on the door.

"Come in," he whispered, hoping she would not hear him and go away.

But she heard him.

"Husband," Wanda said simply. She closed the door behind her and stood staring at him.

"Madam," he said, "I hope you will have the kindness not to refer to me by that indecent appelation a second time."

"Gee. You say the cutest things. I'm awful glad you had to marry me, huh."

The captain stood up, adjusted his coat and his shoulders, and walked across the room to the dressing table. He opened the left-hand drawer, removed a bottle, poured himself half a waterglass full and drank it off.

"Ah," he said.

He returned to the bed and sat down.

"Cantcha even say hello ta little ol' me, huh?" she asked.

"Hello," he said. "Madam, sit down. I intend to give you an instructive lecture in the natural order of . . ."

"Huh?"

"Ah," he said. "Quite true, of course."

She walked over to the chair and sat down. "I don't like them," she said. "Them cloth things over there."

"Those, Madam," he said, "are priceless drapes I had imported from the province of San Xalthan. They have a long, strange history.

"About three thousand years ago, a family by the name of Soong was forced to flee from the city of Xan because the eldest son of the family had become involved in a conspiracy against the illustrous King Fod. As the Soong family was traveling. . . ."

"I don't like 'em anyway," said Wanda.

"Madam," said the captain, "kindly bring me that."

"This?"

"Yes. Thank you."

He took the doll from her. He got up again, walked to the chest of drawers, searched around for a

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penknife. Finally he located it under a stack of socks.

He returned to the bed. Sitting on the edge, he began to rip the doll along the seams with the penknife. Very carefully he emptied the sawdust out upon the carpet, and with equal deliberation, he cut up the canvas covering into small patches. Within fifteen minutes, for he worked very slowly, the doll was completely destroyed.

He laid the penknife on the night stand by his bed. He took out a match and struck it across the bottom of his shoe; he bent over and ignited the remains of the doll.

"You'll burn yer rug," Wanda said.

"Yes," the captain said, "I will. Be so kind as to close the door when you leave."

V

THE next day the captain appeared at mess.

The third mate said, "I want to thank you for what you done for me, Captain."

"Don't mention it," the captain said, bisecting a pilchard with his fork.

"It's nice Wanda gets to be in the Festival," Jane said. "It pleases my husband so."

"I'm very excited about it all," the steward said.

The first mate turned his egg over with his fork and peered suspiciously at the underside of it. "Hit's all right fur you uns ta feel excited. Martha an' me are still purty bitter."

"Yes," Martha said, "I don't see why the children couldn't take care of themselves."

"Who'd get the new crew out of ice?" John, the second mate, said.

"That," the first mate admitted, "is th' problem. Can'tcha even cook an aig?" he asked the steward.

"What's the matter with the egg?" the third mate asked.

"Hit hain't cooked right," the first mate insisted.

"Helen," the captain said, "may I see you after the meal?"

Helen looked demurely into her plate. "Certainly, captain. But if it's about the Changing of the Wives, I've already been asked for."

"And," John said proudly, "I'll bet she was one of the first ones asked."

"Nestir asked my wife almost a month ago," said Harry. "She was the very first."

"Well," the captain said, "that's what I had in mind." He turned to survey the table. His eyes lit upon Mary, the steward's wife.

She looked at him and shook her head. "John already asked me."

"Well," the captain said, "I

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must say, this is a very fine breakfast, steward. I dearly love pilchards for breakfast. Convey my compliments to the cook."

"Yes, sir."

"CAPTAIN," said Nestir, "I was telling the men . . . just before you came . . . in about the great pageant of Koltah in the year of '93. At the time, in a special celebration — *annum mirabelei* — we decided to observe the ancient customs of Meizque. The customs are of some interest, and I thought we might apply several of them to our own Festival."

"Whatever you wish," said the captain tiredly, stirring his coffee.

Before Nestir could resume his account, John interrupted. "I want to mention this again. I have a very special treatment for you, Captain. You should be encouraged by that. No one will ever have a better Casting Off than you."

"Thank you," said the captain. "I shall look forward to it." He laid down his spoon. "Oh, Anne. May I see you?"

"I'm sorry," said the wife of Barney, the engineer. "Really and truly I am, but I've already been asked, too."

"Oh," said the captain.

He looked over at the last officer's wife, Leota. But he quickly looked away.

"Well," he said, "this is a fine breakfast we have this morning steward."

"Thank you, sir. I'll tell the cook."

Jane said, in order to stave off the encroaching silence, "Nestir, how old are you?"

"Going on forty — Jane."

"The prime of life," the steward said.

"Ah," the captain said thoughtfully. "Leota . . . "

She looked up and soundlessly her mouth formed the words, "Too late."

The captain dropped the spoon to his plate.

Silence fell. It grew prolonged and uncomfortable. Finally the first mate said, "Hit hain't the right way to cook aigs, damn hit."

The captain said, "Father, I say. All the officers' wives have been asked."

"Yes," said Nestir. "They have, haven't they?"

"Do you suppose it would be all right if I just . . ."

"You know the rules," Nestir said sternly.

"That's what I was afraid you'd say," said the captain. He looked up at the ceiling; his face was placid. He reached up with his right hand and began to scratch his chin. He scratched his chin for a long time, scarcely breathing.

The officers and their wives

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were silent, waiting for him to speak.

"I BELIEVE I'll have another cup of coffee," he said at last.

"Yes, sir," said the steward, snapping his fingers for the waiter.

Martha said: "You should have asked earlier."

"I know," the captain said. "Father, I really don't see why I have to Change Wives."

"But Harry will have yours that day. And you know the rules."

"There are a lot of good-looking women in the crew," the steward said.

"Quite a number," said the captain.

He arose from the table and steadied himself a moment. "Never mind the coffee," he said. "I shouldn't drink over one cup for breakfast. I believe it aggravates my scrofula."

He turned and walked out of the mess hall.

He walked very straight and tall. He walked down the crew's corridor toward their quarters.

Shortly he saw a woman coming out of one of the cabins.

"Madam," he said.

She came over to him. "Yes, sir?"

"Madam," he said, "Madam, I . . ."

"Would ja like to have a drink of water? It's right down this way, an' then ya turn ta the left."

"No . . . uh. I . . . Madam, would you honor me by becoming my partner for the night of the Changing of the Wives?"

She balanced on the balls of her feet and looked up at him. "Yur th' captain, ain'tcha?"

"Yes," he said. "I am."

"Sure, I'll do hit," she said. "I'd be mighty proud ta."

The captain turned away and then turned back. "Madam," he said, "what is your name?"

"Joanne Marie. Jest ask for me. Everybody down here knows me."

"Joanne Marie, Joanne Marie," he repeated under his breath. He shuddered and turned to go.

VI

THE day of the Changing of the Wives came to the ship. It was a very important ritualistic day, held, always, three weeks and one day before the Festival of the Casting Off.

The morning of the day, Nestir spoke to the assembled complement. He explained its symbolic importance: he explained its historic development; he delivered, *in cretia ultimatum est*, an exegesis on the *Jarcon*. And then he took off the cloak of priestcraft and cast it to the floor. "For I

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am," he said, "Ah, a man as you are men."

Then, being no longer empowered to pronounce a benediction (under normal conditions, the function of a younger priest), he left the cheering members of Flight Seventeen A and sped directly to his stateroom.

The afternoon passed uneventfully. The complement of the ship moved about their routine chores tingling in anticipation of the evening.

At the evening meal, a new seating arrangement was instituted at the insistence of the steward and the third mate. The newly formed couples were to sit side by side.

To accomplish this, it was necessary to set two extra plates in the officers' mess. One, for Wanda, next to the third mate; and one, for Joanne Marie, beside the captain.

"Please pass the meat," the third mate said.

Nestir handed it across to him.

"'Thank you, Father."

"Today, *in culpa res*, I no longer have that honor," Nestir reminded him. "The blood-red cloak of priestcraft will never again touch my shoulders this side of the Reward."

"I'd be a little sad," said the steward.

"Oh, I don't know," the third mate said.

"It probably all depends," Helen, the wife of the second mate, agreed.

"Hit's a far, far better thing *I* do," the first mate said sonorously. He was a little drunk.

The captain speared one pea and ate it. "I envy you," he said, looking over at Joanne Marie.

Wanda Miller, who had already upset her glass of water in the third mate's lap, said, "Pass the biscuits, hey . . . You uns have better'n we do."

"No," said the steward, "not at all, my dear. We eat the same as the crew."

"Yes; precisely so," the third mate said.

"Except ours is fixed up a little differently," said Jane.

"An' our cook can't fry an aig," the first mate said.

"I wouldn't say that," said the captain.

"Shucks," Joanne Marie said, "anybody can fry an aig."

"On the contrary, Madam. I recall once, when I was a political adviser for the Kong regime . . ."

"Do you mean mea-Kong?" the steward asked.

"No, that was in Koltah."

"Yes," Nestir said. "I am very familiar with them. They . . ."

"That's not the one I meant," the captain snapped.

Nestir leaped to his feet. "Well!" he said loudly. "I'm through eating."

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"Oh, come now, old man. There's no hurry, really, y'know," the captain insisted gently.

"Ain't there?" Joanne Marie asked. "Gee. I can see you sure ain't like my husband. I mean my ex." She giggled.

"Well, I guess I'm finished, too," Jane said. "Well. Good night, Harry."

"Good night, dear."

IN the mess hall, the lights were out. The figure of the captain loomed like a stark obelisk in the gloom.

"Captain, sir, we uns uv been sittin' here at this table fur hours an' hours. I'm gettin' purty tired us sittin'."

"It's not long until the Festival," he said.

"When the mess boy cleared away all them dishes, I thought shore you'd leave, then."

"Oh, no," said the captain. "This is very exciting."

"It ain't, the way I see it," Joanne Marie said.

"Different perspective, Madam. Doubtless you would not have considered it very exciting either, the time I ran a wagon train from Tamask-Cha. You see, the material was to be delivered on a mining contract. Madam, I can assure you it was hot. The only road was a narrow line across the Ubiq desert. And late the first evening . . ."

"I can see it warn't very exciting," Joanne Marie said.

Silence returned.

"I am getting sleepy," the captain said at length.

"Oh, I'm usually awake this late. Shucks, I'm used to it. Sometimes I jest get ta sleep when it's time ta get up. But I do wish we'd go to bed."

"Madam, your language!"

"All I said was . . ."

"I know; I know," the captain said. "Madam, come to my stateroom. You may sleep on the sofa."

"Weeeel," Joanne Marie said, "I ain't a-sayin' that. I know my rights."

"Let us not be difficult. I am certain, when I explain to you in a logical fashion the obvious impossibility of— of —"

"You got no wife?"

"No," he said.

"Yeah. I thought not. That sure is swell."

"Madam. Perhaps I can say it this way. I have certain perturbations, but I can assure you, whatever you attempt my aim is inflexible. For me, the Captain, to— ah — consort with a crew woman is preposterous."

"Is that what you call it? Now that's a funny word. My husband calls it—"

"Madam!"

Joanne Marie was cowed into silence. They walked directly to his stateroom.

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Once inside, Joanne Marie said, "Now ya jest sit down, comfortable like. I got somethin' I want to tell ya."

"No," the captain said.

"I ain't even told ja yet."

"It won't matter," the captain said.

"My husband don't like me," she said.

He dropped his head into his hands and sighed deeply. Then he looked up, his face set in icy resignation.

VII

JOHN, the second mate, awoke early the morning of the Festival.

"Helen, honey," he said. "Wake up."

She murmured sleepily.

"Come on, now, wake up."

She rolled over to her side of the bed.

"All right," he said. He reached out, fumbled for and found his cigarettes.

"You know what I'm going to do to the captain?" he asked. He lit a cigarette and lying on his back blew smoke rings at the ceiling.

"Yes," his wife said, "you told me."

"First, I'm going to take that saber I got on Queglat and scrape open his scrofula. Then, when he's bleeding nicely, all I have to do is pour a bottle of alcohol on him. Don't you think that will be nice?"

"Yes, dear."

"You know, I'm kinda sorry I went to all the trouble sharpening that saber. After all, it might be more painful if the saber was dull."

"Yes, dear."

"But then, on the other hand . . ."

"Dear, will you hand me a cigarette?"

"Sure."

He shook out a cigarette, lit it off his and handed it to her.

"So what do you think?"

"It doesn't matter, dear," she said.

"Oh, but it does matter," John insisted. "I think it's very important." He snubbed out his cigarette. "It's all the little details that one should take into account. Can't be too careful about something like that."

He rolled over on his back again. "I'm hungry," he said.

"I really thought they should have served breakfast," Helen said.

"Well, it wouldn't be right to leave all those dirty dishes for the second crew."

"I mean just sandwiches."

"Yes," he said, "they could have made up some sandwiches. I think, though, I'd settle for a cup of tea."

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"I could brew you some on the hot plate."

"It's too much bother," John said. "Are you sure you wouldn't mind?"

"No. If you'll get up and put the water on."

"All right," he said.

He threw his legs over the side, fumbled with his feet for the house slippers, padded to the hot plate, put the water on, and came back to bed.

"We've still got an hour before the bell," he said.

"Are you going to shave?"

"I don't think so; not today," he said.

"By the way, honey; what's in that can over there?"

"Fuel oil," she said.

"What's it for?"

"You'd be surprised," she said.

After a while, the water began to sizzle against the sides of the pan.

"Time to get up," she said. She crawled over her husband, slipped into a robe, and proceeded to brew the tea.

"It's not much of a breakfast, John."

"Say," he said, "where's my bottle of alcohol for the captain."

"I set it over by the medicine cabinet, out of the way."

"I wonder if it'll be enough?" he mused.

"I hope so," she said. "Are you going to get up, or must I serve you this tea in bed? I will if you want me to."

"I'll get up," he said. He got up.

"Let's take it in the nook to drink," he said.

"Can't."

"Oh? Why not?"

"One of the legs is off the table."

"If you'd told me, I'd fixed it."

"Never mind," she said.

THEY each drank two cups of tea; and then each dressed for the Festival.

After that, they sat in silence, awaiting the bell to signal the start of the Festival.

"I'm going to hurry out," John said at length, "as soon as the bell rings, so I can stand outside the captain's door and get him when he comes out."

"That's not fair, John," she said. "You're supposed to wait for the second bell before you can even start to Cast anyone Off."

"I know," said John, "but this way, I'll be sure to get the captain."

"Well," she said, "I'm certainly glad you have that attitude."

He asked, after more silence, "What are you going to do?"

"I think I'll stay here for a little while," she said.

"Yes, that might —"

The bell rang soundingly throughout the ship.

"Time to go," John said. He

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grabbed his saber. "Where's the alcohol?"

"In there," she said.

He skidded into the bathroom, pocketed the alcohol, and started for the door.

"John!"

"Huh?"

"Aren't you even going to kiss me good-by?"

"Oh, sure. Forgot." He crossed to her, bent down and kissed her. She put her left arm around his neck. With her right hand, she located the table leg she had placed behind her pillow.

John drew away and half turned. "Good —"

She hit him in the left temple with the table leg. He went down like a poleaxed steer.

She laughed happily.

VIII

WHEN the bell sounded for the people to separate, preparatory to the hunt proper, the captain got up and buckled on his huge infantry sword. He had spent most of the night sharpening it.

He had after long hours of considering, decided that there was only one honorable course left to him. He would defend himself.

For if he were the Sole Survivor of the hunt, he would be Cast Off properly by the first mate. Otherwise . . .

The possibility that it might be done by a crewman was staggeringly humiliating. He would salvage his honor from that final indignity at all costs.

Of course, if he were captured by an officer, it would be a different matter entirely; he would surrender and submit like the gentleman he was. But a crewman . . .

He took the sword out of the scabbard and rubbed his thumb along the side of it.

He swung it, and it whistled in the air crisply, pleasingly.

He grasped it firmly in his right hand and walked to the door. He threw open the door and jumped back and away.

But it was safe; there was no one outside.

He stepped into the corridor.

Empty.

He looked both ways. He listened.

Then he began to run, swiftly, silently, on his toes.

At the first intersection, he stopped and surveyed the crossing corridor.

To his left, almost at the far bend, he saw a crewman; however, the man was not looking in his direction, and the captain felt that he could be reasonably safe from detection if he crossed quickly enough. He sprinted across the open space.

On the other side, he stopped and waited. After several minutes

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of silence, he knew that he could safely continue.

He ran for a long distance.

Finally, safely down in the second level, he slowed to a walk. He was breathing heavily; it was very loud, and his footsteps echoed hollowly.

He was alone down there. He could tell that.

At the Jonson bend, he breathed a sigh of relief. Ahead was the empty corridor that led to the dead end, Forward. He could see down it, clear to the bulkhead. And as he knew it would be, it was devoid of life and movement.

He sat down to wait out the long day.

He scratched his chin.

He would have nothing to do until the closing bell. At which time he would be forced to go to the assembly area.

As would anyone else, according to the rules of the Festival as laid down by Nestir, who had not yet been sent to his Reward.

That would be a dangerous time. For then there would be no esthetic consideration. It would be a fight amongst all assembling for the final honor of Sole Survivor. One could expect no mercy: clean, quick sword stroke, no more. No suffering at all.

It was not a pleasant prospect. But to be the coveted Sole Survivor compensated for the risk.

The captain laid the sword across his lap and petted it.

He would fight. And no crew member need expect to be the man Cast Off by the first mate; that was to be the captain's fate.

The second bell called to the ship shrilly.

The hunt was on!

MARTHA and the first mate assembled the children in the large, comfortable hospital. The steward's department had fixed them all a lunch. The children were silent, for the angry brow of the first mate was a complete damper on their usual animal spirits. There was no holiday happiness.

The children moved around and fell into little, shifting groups. Several of them began to game at marbles, but the first mate broke it up before it degenerated into a fist fight.

"Well, there goes the hunting bell," Martha said.

"Yes," the mate said, "hit do, don't hit."

"I think they could have a regular nurse for this sort of thing," Martha said.

The mate grunted. "Humph. I shore hope they uns don't raise no ruckus. I've got me a splittin' haidache."

"Shhhh. Listen. I thought I heard someone scream."

"Yep," the mate said. "I was

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sure afraid uv hit; won't be able to heyar myself think all day long. I'm a-tellin' ya, Martha, if these young uns start a-actin' up, too, I'm jest a-gonna take a knife an' split this here haid open, Reward or no Reward."

"That's not a nice way to talk," Martha said.

"No, hit hain't. But I'm a-sayin' hit."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," Martha said. "I'll call all the children together and tell them nursery stories. That oughta keep them quiet. And you go over there and lay down where there won't be anyone to bother you."

"All right, Martha, an' I shore do thankee."

The first mate made his way to the farthest bed, sat down, took off his shoes, and stretched out on it. He reached up and felt his head tenderly.

"Children," Martha called. "Oh, children! I want you all to come over here."

Reluctantly, the children obeyed her.

"That's right," she said. "Now. You all sit down and make yourselves comfortable, and be still as mice so my husband can sleep, and I'll tell you stories. And then, after a while, we'll eat the nice lunch the steward fixed for us, and we'll all have the bestest time."

"I don't like you," one of the little boys said.

"Little boy," Martha said, "I don't like you, either."

"Oh," the little boy said.

"Now," Martha said, "I'm going to tell you the wonderful story about a very pretty Princess and a very pretty Prince: Once upon a time, there was a land called Zont. It sank long ago under the big, salty sea of Zub . . ."

"My name's Joey," the little boy said.

"Well, Joey," Martha said, "do you see that long, steel rod over there, where we hang clothing from?"

"Uh-huh."

"If you don't shut your little mouth, I'll hang you on it by your thumbs."

"Betcha ya won't," one of the little girls said.

"ONCE upon a time," Martha said, "there was this handsome Prince and pretty Princess. But the father of the Princess, King Exaltanta, was a heathen and did not believe in the Prophet. Now. When a true believer, kind King Farko, captured King Exaltanta's kingdom, the deposed king hid his daughter in the deepest dungeon.

"Now when the fair Prince, who was the son of King Farko, and whose name was William, heard of the Princess in the dungeon, he decided that he would rescue her and marry her. And after she had

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had one child by him, the two of them would travel to the Holy City of Meizque to participate in the Changing of the Wives and the Festival there.

"Well, it so happened that King Farko got a special dispensation from the Great Priest to send the members of Exaltanta's family to their Reward without their consent. As he prepared the ceremonies — they were to be very simple: for, after all, the royal household members weren't true believers, and would consequently need to spend a million years (at least) as Outcasts before entering into their Reward, anyhow — as he prepared the ceremonies . . ."

"But does everyone get a Reward? Even people who don't believe?" a little girl asked, wide eyed.

"Nearly everyone, my child. The Prophet was not a cruel man. Of course, people who try to Cast themselves Off never, never, never get a Reward. But others, everybody else, all get theirs. It's only a question of how long they have to wait. Sometimes, as when they're unbelievers, it may be a long, long, long time, but . . ."

"I know that," Joey said.

Martha looked up at him and sighed; she stood up. "Come with me, dear," she said.

At that moment, the door flew open with a loud bang.

The first mate, who had been asleep, sat bolt upright on the bed. "God damn hit!" he screamed. "My haid!"

"Oh," said a crew member, who was dragging a woman by the hair, "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't know you were in here. I just came in to Cast Mary Jane Off in privacy." He waved an odd-looking instrument at Martha by way of amplification.

"Hello, mummy," one of the smaller girls said to the woman.

"Oh, why, hello, honey. Are you having fun?"

"Oh, yes, mummy."

Mary Jane looked at the crewman. "Well, Bob," she said, "I guess we'll just have to go some place else."

"Well, git hout er come in, but shut that door! That noise out there is a-tearin' off my haid!"

The crewman called Bob dragged the woman called Mary Jane out of the room. She pulled the door closed behind her.

"Well, children," Martha said, "we ought to get back to my story. Now, King Farko, as you will remember, received a special dispensation . . ."

NESTIR locked his door when the separation bell sounded.

Having done that, he proceeded to fix himself a meal. It was a simple one, consisting only of what material he had been able

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to steal from the steward's department the previous night.

As he ate, he reflected upon his course of action. It was, he could see, going to be difficult to justify at the Reward. But he had been a priest, and because of that he was reasonably well grounded in theological dialectics.

The Festival, of course, was a fine thing. But it had its weak points. Chief among them being that the Casting Off was left to inexperienced hands, and certainly, if there was ever a time when experience was required, then the Casting Off was that time. One should be Cast Off at leisure; suffering long and deliciously. A state hero, for instance, honored by being Cast Off by one of the King's Guards, certainly died the best death imaginable.

In the present case, although the death as Sole Survivor was to come at the hands of the first mate (who really lacked the training for such a position of trust), it would be the best Casting Off available. For the first mate could follow instructions, and Nestir had written the instructions.

Nestir intended to remain in the stateroom all day; the hunt would go merrily along without him.

When the assembly bell rang, he would still remain in his stateroom.

Then, late at night, he would leave. He would slip down to the first mate's stateroom and determine from him where the premature Sole Survivor slept. Then he would find him and Cast him Off in his sleep. And Nestir would be the actual Sole Survivor.

Nestir could justify his conduct by virtue of the little known theological clause: *ego bestum alpha todas*. A decision handed down by the High Court of the Prophet (Malin vs the Estate of Kattoa: T & C, '98) nearly a hundred years previously.

Nestir had, in his hip pocket, a small vial of slow-acting poison. He would drink it just before Casting the man Off. Then were he not handled the next day by the first mate, he would die the Outcast death, by his own hand.

He did not doubt his ability to convince Them at the Reward. It would be difficult, but it was not beyond his ability. Certainly, if no one took the opportunity of Casting him Off as he sat behind the locked door of his room, it wasn't Nestir's fault.

The bosun pushed the ventilator grill away and jumped out of the shaft even before it hit the carpet.

He landed catlike, his knees bending springily to absorb the shock. He landed directly behind Nestir and pushed the little man against the wall.

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Nestir struggled out of the wreckage of the chair.

"How . . . why . . . why . . . ?" he said

"Ah-ha," the bosun said. "Fooled ja, didn't I?"

The bosun was carrying a thin rapier.

"Let's discuss this," Nestir said. "One must go about these things slowly."

"Sorry," the bosun said.

"My God," said Nestir, "you can't Cast me Off just like that: without any suffering!"

"Sorry," the bosun said. "Don't have all day. Spend all day with you, and then what? The more people I can Cast Off before the assembly bell, the better chance I'll have to be the Sole Survivor."

"Have you no compassion, man? Can you turn aside from the course of the gentle Prophet?"

"Sorry," the bosun said again, sincerely. "I can't stand here all day discussing it."

"Ah, me," said Nestir as the bosun drew back from the thrust, "who would have thought that I would be trapped by a religious fanatic?"

"Must look out for myself, you know," said the bosun.

IX

HELEN said, "I thought maybe I hit you too hard."

"No," John said. "Fortunately not." He had just opened his eyes.

He was strapped tightly to the bed. "I appreciate what you're doing," he said. "I know you want to be sure I'm Cast Off right. But honey, do you think it was fair to jump the bell on me like that?"

"Well," she said, "that's what you intended to do to the captain."

He grinned ruefully. "Darn it. I did look forward to Casting him Off."

"Oh, well," his wife said, "I guess we can't have everything."

"True, my dear," said John. "It was very thoughtful of you."

"I wanted to be sure that my husband had the best."

"I know you did."

"Well," she said. "I guess I may as well begin."

"Yes," he said.

"Have you any suggestions, honey?"

"No," he said. "I'll leave it all up to you."

"All right." She walked to the dresser and picked up a pair of pliers. She crossed to him.

She had already removed his shoes while he was unconscious.

"I think," she said, "I'll take the big toe first."

"Whatever you like, my dear."

After a moment, she said, "My, I didn't know it was going to be so hard to pull a few little old toenails."

After she had finished with his

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left foot, she poured alcohol over it.

Then she had to wait for him to regain consciousness.

"Honey?" she asked.

"Yes?"

"You didn't scream very much."

"That's all right," he said. "You're doing fine."

"All right," she said. "If you're satisfied. I guess I may as well start on the other foot . . . Oh, John?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Would you like for me to fix you a cup of tea before we go on?"

"I don't think so. But it's a nice thought."

"Honey?"

"Yes?"

"You asked what that fuel oil was for, remember?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I finish this," she said, "I'm going to pour it over you and light it."

"Helen," he said, "I married one of the . . . cleverest . . . women . . . in the . . . system."

"There," she said, "I thought I'd *never* get that one."

THE captain got very cramped, sitting there. It was late. He expected it was about time for the assembly bell to ring.

He stood up.

No one had come down his corridor all day, and he felt very pleased with his acumen in selecting it.

There wasn't nearly as much noise as there had been earlier; people were thinning out. He hoped there wouldn't be many left in the fight for the assembly.

He heard, interrupting his reverie, a thin, shrill shriek, drifting down the corridor from his left. Then, looking, he saw a crewman running toward him.

He tightened his grip on his infantry sword.

Then he relaxed. It was all right.

The man had no arms.

The crewman came to a stop in front of him.

"Oh? Captain. Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon. Careful there. You'll get blood on my uniform."

"Sorry, sir."

"How are things going, back there?"

"Pretty slow . . . last . . . couple hours."

"Getting pretty weak, eh?"

"Yes, sir. Mind if . . . I . . . sit down?"

"Not at all. Make yourself at home."

"Thank . . . you, sir." He sat down. "My," he said, "I'm tired."

"Loss of blood, probably. Listen, old fellow. Do you think you've about quit suffering, now?"

"Oh, yes," the crewman said.

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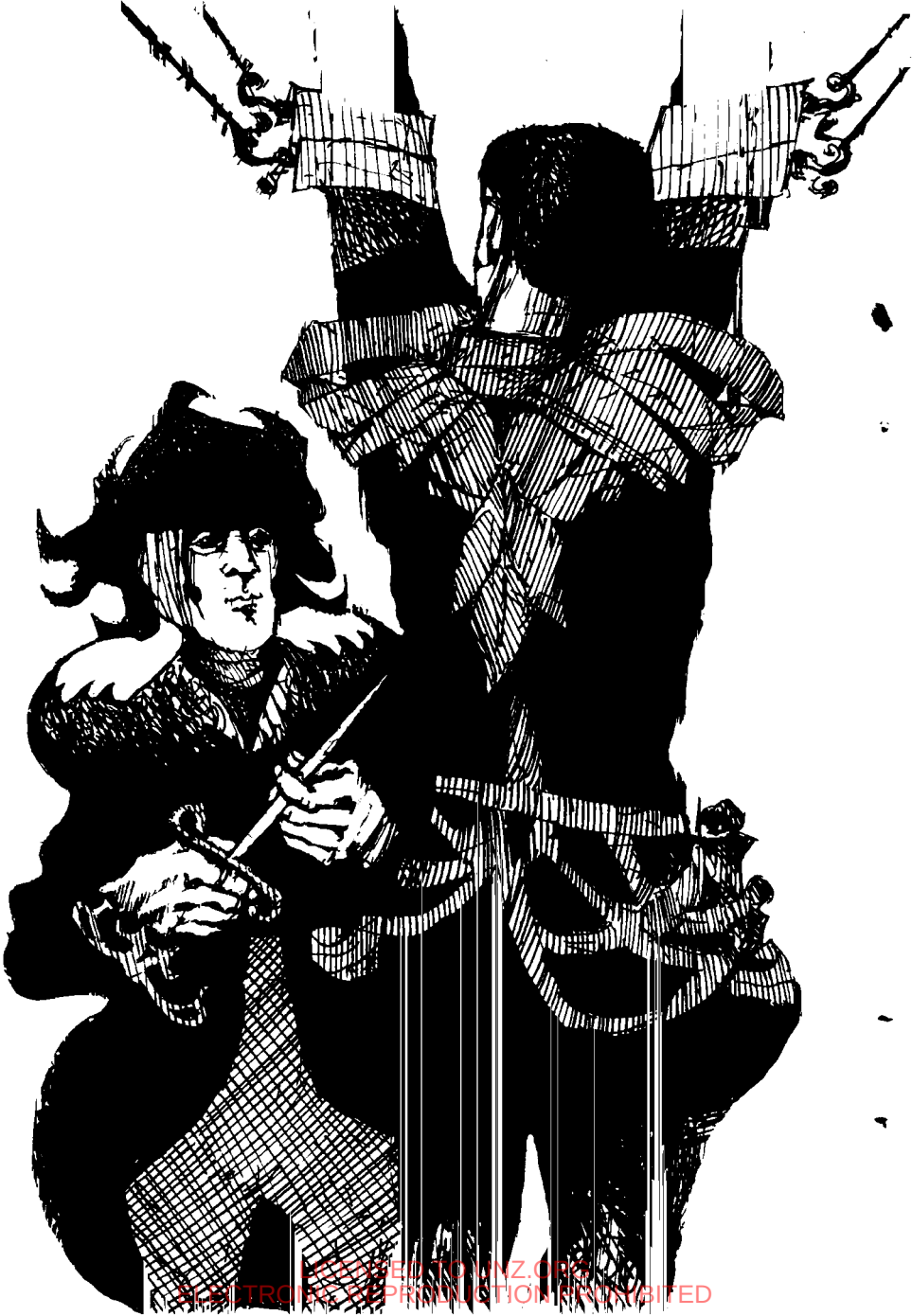

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"Scarcely feel . . . a thing any more. Numb."

"Well, in that case, no sense in keeping you from your Reward."

"Not . . . a bit."

The captain drew back his huge sword.

"See . . . you . . . around," the crewman said.

The sword whistled down.

The captain wiped the sword on the crewman's blouse. His legs were still stiff. He needed a little exercise. He began to walk toward the dead end of the corridor, keeping a weather eye behind him.

". . . Bombs away!"

The crewman hurtled onto his shoulders from the steampipe above.

The captain fell flat, and his sword went skittering away, rattling loudly on the steel deck.

"Umph!" he said.

"Boy!" the crewman said, "I shore thought you'd *never* come back down here."

The captain was stunned. He could feel the crewman lashing his hands together behind him.

"What were you doing up there?" the captain said at length.

"I clumb up there when I a-hyeared ya a-comin' like a herd o' elephants. I thought ta come down here an' wait hit out 'til th' assembly bell."

"My intentions exactly," the captain said, testing his bonds. There was no escape from them. "Your voice sounds familiar."

"Yeah. Hit should. I'm Henderson, th' officers' messman."

"Lord give me strength," the captain said.

"Now, iffen you'll jest roll over on yer back, Captain."

"What for, my boy?"

"I kinda thought that first off I'd like ta pour this little bottle of hydrofluoric acid on ya."

"That's very clever," the captain said. Then he reconsidered. "For a crewman, that is."

X

THE first mate looked over at the bosun.

"Uncomfortable?"

"Yes," the bosun said.

"Fine, I thought you'd be." He took out his penknife and began to whittle on a piece of wood.

After a while he said, "You haint mindin' me puttin' hit off this away?"

"No," the bosun said, "suit yourself."

The first mate sent a shaving skittering with his knife blade. "Shucks," he said, "there hain't really no hurry."

The bosun raised his head from his chest and shook the hair out of his face. "Not really, when you consider it," he said.

"Yep, that's right." The first mate began to work on the point

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of the stick; he sharpened it down to needle fineness, and then he carefully cut in the barb. "Hain't very strong wood; them barbs are cut against the grain, an' they're liable ta split off when I try ta pull 'em out."

"I hope not," the bosun said.

The first mate said, "Yep, I'm shore afraid they're a-gonna do jest that little trick."

"Look," said the bosun, "this hair's gettin' in my eyes. I wunder if you'd mind kinda snippin' it off?"

"Not a-tall," the first mate said.

He walked over to the bosun, grabbed a handful of hair and sawed it off with the penknife.

"That better?"

"It shore is. Thanks."

"Not a-tall."

The first mate threw down the stick on the table. "Really should uv cut that before."

"I suppose so," the bosun said. "'Course I warn't hable to see what uz in th' priest's mind."

"No, that's true," the bosun agreed.

The first mate walked over and picked up the typewritten instructions.

"You're a-gonna get a fine Castin' Off," he said.

"I should," the bosun said. "It ain't everybody can be th' Sole Survivor."

"That's true," the first mate said. "Well," he said after a minute, "I jest guess I know them there instructions fine as anything. I suspect we may as well start, iffen hits agreeable ta you."

"I'm ready," the bosun said.

The first mate took his penknife and tested the edge with his thumb. "Shore is sharp," he said. "Ought ta be. I jest got done a-honin' hit."

HE walked over to where the bosun was hanging.

"Well," he said. "No time like the present."

He raised the knife.

"Jest a minute," he said. "I think I'll get me some music on the radio. You don't mind?"

"No," said the bosun. "Not a bit."

The first mate walked to the hyperspace radio and flicked on the dial. After fiddling with it for some time, he picked up a symphony being broadcast from Kque. "There," he said, "that's th' kind uv music I shore do like ta hear."

The music welled out and filled the room with sound.

"Shore is purty," the bosun said.

The first mate walked back to him.

"Guess I'll start on your back," he said. He reached up and ripped the bosun's shirt off.

Then, when the back was laid bare, he made a very shallow cut

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running the length of the shoulders from armpit to armpit.

"Be kinda hard ta get started," he said.

He put the penknife in the incision and began to pry the skin loose. "Gonna take me a long time ta get a hand holt," he said. "'Course onct I do, hit'll be as easy as skinnin' a skunk."

"Take yer time," the bosun said.

"Aim to."

The music turned quiet and sounded of the rippling brooks on far Corazon; it reflected the vast meadows of Nid and the giant, silver-capped mountains of Muri. A cello picked up the theme and ran it, in rich notes, over the whole surface of the dead world, Astolath. A whining oboe piped of the sweet winds from Zoltah; and the brass beat out the finny rhythm of the water world of Du.

"'Scuse me," the first mate said. He laid down the penknife and walked to the radio. With a flick of his wrist, he cut it off.

"What uz th' matter with hit?" the bosun asked.

"Didn't ja notice?" said the first mate. "Th' third fiddle was sour."

"Guess I wasn't listenin' close enough," said the bosun.

The first mate returned to his work. "May as well get on with it," he said.

He raised the penknife again.

MARTHA threw the door open. "Here!" she said. She swung Joey around in front of her by the left ear. "I'm going to have to leave him in here with you, where he won't get into trouble."

The first mate laid aside the penknife.

"Martha," he said, "I jest plain don't like kids."

"I'm sorry," she said, "But I just can't keep him with the rest of the children. I just can't."

"Whatud he do?" the bosun asked.

"Do? Let me tell you," Martha said. "First, he . . . "

"I didn't," Joey said.

"I haint got no all day ta listen ta ya, woman," the first mate said.

"Well. The worst of it was with little Jane. Do you know what he tried to do to her?"

"No, and I shore don't care," said the first mate testily.

"Well, first he got her down under the table; and then he sat on her; and if I hadn't stopped him, he would have pounded her brains out against the deck."

"My, my," said the bosun.

"That hain't a-tall nice."

"Grownups do it," Joey said.

"That's entirely different," the bosun said.

"No, it ain't. You just don't like me, that's all."

"Little Jane wasn't ready," Martha said. "She hasn't had a chance to do her duty."

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"It don't matter," Joey said.

"Little boy," said the bosun, "do you know where people go who talk that way?"

"I don't care," Joey said.

"You see? I'll simply have to leave him in here with you."

"All right," the first mate agreed reluctantly. "Now, little boy," he said, "you hain't a-gonna bother me, hear? I'm very busy. You jest go over there and watch."

"Yes," said the bosun.

Martha said, "Well, I better get back to the other children."

She left and the first mate turned back to his job.

"What's he crying for?" Joey asked.

"'Cause it hurts," the first mate explained.

"You missed somethin' there in th' back," Joey said.

"Why did you try to choke that little girl?" the mate asked.

"'Cause I wanted to."

"Well," the first mate said, "that's why I left that little patch o' skin."

"Oh," said Joey.

He stood up and walked around the bosun.

"What're ya gonna do next?" he asked.

"Be still," said the bosun.

"I bet I know," Joey said. "I'll bet you're gonna take that little stick over there an' stick it in him."

"That shore . . . is right," the bosun said proudly.

"Can I, huh?"

"No," the first mate said.

"Why not? All ya gotta do is . . ." He picked up the stick and lunged at the bosun.

THE first mate tripped him and took the stick away from him.

"Let him alone," the bosun said to Joey. "He's doin' jest fine."

"Thankee," said the first mate.

Martha came back.

"Is he bothering you? We could put him in the ice with the new crew," she said.

"Fine," the first mate said.

"Oh, no," Joey said. "You gotta catch me first." He began to back away from Martha.

She took a step toward him.

He turned and started to run.

"Thought so," she said. She had been holding one hand behind her. It contained a plastic ashtray. She caught him squarely between the ears with it, and he went down.

"Good heave, Martha!" the first mate said.

She walked over to Joey, picked him up and started to the door.

At the door she paused.

"What did you say you wanted for supper, Fontelroy?"

"Two aigs," he said.

— KRIS NEVILLE

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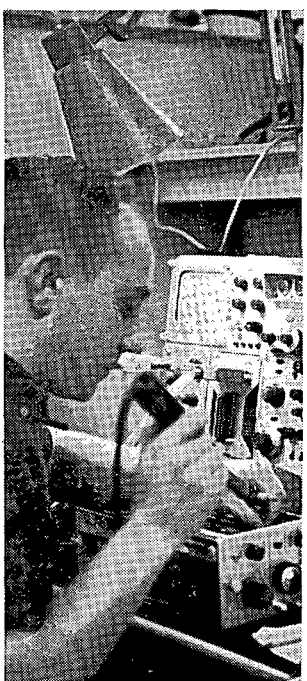

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